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Kuwait doctor treats AAA without detrimental dye

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Egypt gig economy workers face rough ride, pressures

16

Fury beats Whyte to retain world heavyweight title

Ramadan Timings

Fajr	03:48
Shurooq	05:12
Dhuhr	11:46
Asr	15:21
Maghrib	18:20
Isha	19:42



Amir calls on citizens, residents to unite, cooperate to face challenges

Sheikh Nawaf cautions reform does not happen overnight, urges patience

KUWAIT: On behalf of HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah delivers a speech on the last 10 days of Ramadan. — Amiri Diwan

KUWAIT: HH the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah urged the people of Kuwait to unite and cooperate to face any challenges. This came during HH the Amir's speech on the occasion of the last 10 days of the holy month of Ramadan, which was delivered by HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

"Our unity is the most powerful weapon to preserve our dear homeland. National unity is a fence that protects Kuwait and the Kuwaitis and is a fortress to confront adversity and face challenges," HH the Amir said. During his speech, he also noted that reform in the country has steps and paths, and that it does not happen overnight, and will require great effort, patience and solidarity.

"We will spare no effort in order to protect the capabilities and gains of our beloved homeland, and we will not hesitate to take any decision that guarantees the country's security and stability in light of our authentic democratic approach, our sound constitution and our ancient customs and norms," HH the Amir added.

"In these blessed nights of Ramadan, we proudly recall our late Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, praying on Allah to bestow mercy on his soul, accept our fasting and righteous acts, protect our homeland and maintain the security and prosperity of the country," he said. In addition, HH the Amir prayed to Allah to return this good occasion to Arab and Muslim nations with further blessings and goodness. — KUNA

Ramadan Kareem

Themes of Quran: Signs of God

By Teresa Leshner

Just like this newspaper is a sign of the intelligence, planning and productive ability of human beings, the universe is a sign of the omniscience, will, and omnipotence of a Creator. The Quran recounts many natural phenomena as "signs" of the existence and power of God. Many of these phenomena we see on a daily basis and, perhaps for that reason, we don't consider them miraculous.

But if we really give thought to these phenomena, we will see a powerful presence behind it. Following are just a few of the many signs presented in the Quran. "Blessed is He who has placed in the sky great stars and placed therein a [burning] lamp and a luminous moon" (25:61). "It is Allah who made for you the night that you may rest therein and the day giving sight. Indeed, Allah is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people are not grateful." (40:61)

"Do you not see that ships sail through the sea by the favor of Allah and that He may show you of His signs? Indeed, in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful." (31:31). People have stopped wondering how ships that weigh tons can float on the water, even though a mobile phone, when dropped in the water, quickly sinks! Similarly, when we see an airplane flying high or low, we rarely pause to think what a miracle it is. It is, I believe, a mighty sign of a generous Lord.

"And we placed therein gardens of palm trees and grapevines and caused to burst forth therefrom some springs - that they may eat of His fruit. And their hands have not produced it. So will they not be grateful?" (36:34-35). The fact that a fruit-bearing tree can sprout from a tiny seed is a sign of Allah's power and care. Even though we may create the best conditions for a plant's growth, we have no real power over it when it withers and dies.

"And it is He who produced for you hearing and vision and intellect. Little are you grateful." (23:78) If I asked you to sell me your eyes, you would refuse, knowing that your sight is priceless, as are your abilities to hear and reason. Doesn't the granter such precious things deserve our gratitude? "And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought." (30:21)

Our Creator has not only given us a comfortable environment, nutritious foods to eat, the ability to travel far and wide, and abilities so that

Continued on Page 6

Migrant ship capsizes off Lebanon

TRIPOLI: At least six people died, including a little girl, and almost 50 others were rescued after an overloaded migrant boat capsized off north Lebanon during a chase by naval forces, Lebanese officials said. The boat carrying nearly 60 people capsized on Saturday night near the port city of Tripoli, the departure point for a growing number of people attempting a potentially lethal sea escape. The deadly accident, weeks ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15, is not the first of its kind for the crisis-hit country grappling with its worst-ever financial crash.

But it marks a grim reminder of the suffering behind a growing number of people, including Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees, risking their lives at sea in search of a future abroad. "The army's naval forces managed to rescue 48 people and retrieve the body of a dead girl... from a boat that sank while trying to illegally smuggle them out," the army said in a statement, adding that a suspect had been arrested for alleged involvement in the smuggling operation.

"Most people on board were rescued," the army said, without specifying their nationalities. The army retrieved five corpses off Tripoli's coast on Sunday, the

First flight out of Yemen since 2016 postponed

SANAA: The first commercial flight out of Yemen's rebel-held capital in six years was indefinitely postponed Sunday, after failing to obtain permits from the Saudi-led coalition, the national carrier said. Yemen's government blamed the Iran-backed Houthi rebels for

SANAA: Passengers, travelling onboard a United Nation airplane, arrive at the Sanaa International Airport on April 24, 2022, after the first commercial flight out of Yemen's rebel-held capital in six years was indefinitely postponed, after failing to obtain permits from the Saudi-led coalition. — AFP

state-run National News Agency reported, hours after the body of a little girl was returned to shore. "My nephew, he has five children and his wife is pregnant with twins. He was trying to escape hunger and poverty," one man told AFP at Tripoli's port, where he was waiting to hear news of his missing relative.

Haissam Dannaoui, the head of Lebanon's naval forces, said the 10-meter boat built in 1974 was crammed with nearly 60 would-be migrants and took to sea without any safety precautions. He told a news conference that the army tried to thwart the smuggling operation before the ship sailed out of the Qalamoun region, south of Tripoli, but could not reach the departure point in time.

the postponement, claiming they had tried to "smuggle" members of Tehran's Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah onto the flight.

Authorities in Sanaa, though, accused the coalition of trying to keep Yemeni civilians "in a large prison", and said the denial of permits was a "violation" of a fragile truce. The capital's airport was due to receive the commercial aircraft Sunday morning, reviving hopes that the war-torn country could resume some normal operations. A brutal seven-year conflict pitting Yemen's Saudi-backed government against Shiite Houthi rebels has killed hundreds of thousands of people and pushed the country to the brink of famine.

Continued on Page 6

An ensuing sea chase saw two naval patrols trying to force the migrant boat to turn back. "Unfortunately, the captain (of the migrant boat) decided to carry out manoeuvres to escape," leading to the vessel crashing into the patrol ships, Dannaoui said. The impact cracked the hull of the migrant boat, which quickly submerged, he said. "In less than five seconds, the boat was under water," Dannaoui said, adding that passengers were quickly handed life jackets.

But one of the survivors said a naval ship had deliberately crashed into the migrant boat to force them to return. "The patrol boat crashed into us twice...to drown us," the man told AFP at the port, before he was

Continued on Page 6

Iran seizes ship smuggling fuel in the Gulf

TEHRAN: Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized a foreign vessel smuggling fuel in the Gulf and arrested its crew members, state media said Sunday, in the third such incident reported this month. The Guards "seized a foreign vessel carrying 200,000 liters of smuggled fuel in the north of the Arabian Gulf and directed it to Bushehr (port)", state broadcaster IRIB said, quoting a statement by the Guards's Navy.

"Eight crew members of the vessel, who are foreigners, were arrested and taken to Bushehr port, where they will be handed over to the judicial authorities to complete the investigation and legal processes," it added. The crewmen's nationalities were not specified. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the ideological arm of Iran's military. The incident is the latest in a series of seizures of fuel-smuggling vessels in sea lanes of the Gulf, where a large portion of the world's oil is produced and shipped.—AFP

Local

Kuwait Science Club's divers receive PADI GoPro Award

Kuwait achieved positive results in diving despite pandemic

By Nawara Fattahova

KUWAIT: As one of the leading and certified diving centers in the world, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) awarded the swimming and diving center at the Kuwait Science Club (KSC) with the PADI GoPro Award for its role in improving the diving industry inside and outside Kuwait.

The award was part of the Regional Director of PADI Captain Firas Jindi's visit to GCC countries, where the new updates to PADI's program were discussed. Jindi praised the high standard of Kuwaiti divers and diving instructors in general and the diving instructors of KSC's swimming and diving center in particular. He noticed the increasing number of divers who have undergone professional courses of PADI during the last few years.

Due to the pandemic, Jindi was not able to visit Kuwait for the past two years. "After life returned to normal, PADI's visits were again scheduled to review the activity of certified diving centers. KSC's swimming and diving center is one of two centers in

Kuwait that are specialized in developing the skills of diving instructors," he pointed out.

During the visit, Jindi met the instructor of diving instructors and Director of KSC's Swimming and Diving Center Captain Meshari Al-Khabaaz and other instructors to discuss developments and updates to PADI special programs for training quality systems and standards, and security and safety procedures followed by the organiza-

tion registered visible growth during the pandemic, greater than before the pandemic, because of the e-learning applications and programs of PADI," he noted.

"KSC attracts different age categories, especially young people with different interests. There are only two people holding the title of 'instructor of instructors', and one of them is Captain Meshari Al-Khabaaz, the director of KSC's swimming and diving center, which is important for PADI, which considers KSC as one of the most important centers for training instructors," Jindi said.

Many diving centers around the world survived the pandemic due to e-learning applications. "PADI designed all its programs with the latest e-learning technologies provided in different languages for diving centers including Arabic, which became one of the main languages in PADI's programs and applications. Most specialized courses and main courses were provided in Arabic," he concluded.

Khabbaaz expressed his happiness at the great achievement of KSC to obtain



KUWAIT: Regional Director of PADI Captain Firas Jindi hands the award to KSC's Swimming and Diving Center Captain Meshari Al-Khabaaz.

the PADI GoPro Award. "We are proud that PADI chose the swimming and diving center of KSC as part of its regional visit. This reflects the high standard of our center, which has become one of the best certified diving centers in the

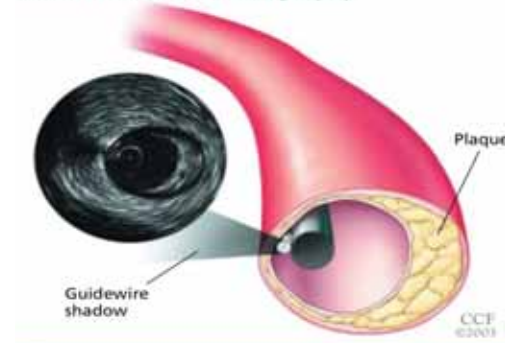
region. The PADI updates seminar, which is the most significant event in the diving industry, was previously held at KSC, as our training center is one of the five-star centers in the region," he explained.

Kuwaiti doctor treats aortic aneurysm without detrimental dye

KUWAIT: A Kuwaiti doctor has succeeded in conducting the first operation to treat an abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) through catheterization using internal ultrasound instead of intravenous dye that may cause complications for some patients. Dr Abdullah Fawaz, a vascular and general surgeon at Mubarak Al-Kabeer Hospital, said on Sunday that the 80-year-old patient had suffered from aortic aneurysm and abdominal bleeding. The patient could neither endure conventional catheterization nor applying the dye that can be detrimental to his kidneys, thus the ideal option rested with employing the ultrasound to examine interior of the arteries. This technique was applied for the first time in Kuwait for treating deformities and healing arteries. Dr Fawaz said he had successfully conducted the operation several times in the United States, but it was the first time he would

perform it in Kuwait, adding that the operation, conducted at Mubarak Hospital, had lasted for two hours and the patient recovered only in one day without suffering from any complications. The internal ultrasound technique is very accurate and is alternative to using the intravenous dye that can be harmful to people with kidney problems. The doctor has explained that the AAA condition develops due to a bulge or swelling in inner part of the aorta, the main blood vessel that runs from the heart down through the chest and tummy. The patient may not feel anything at start of the condition but when it worsens, it may cause painful internal bleeding or death. — KUNA

Intravascular ultrasonography



EPA hosts recycling contest on Earth Day



KUWAIT: The Environment Public Authority (EPA) hosted a competition to collect plastic for recycling on Earth Day. The first-place winner won a KD 500 grand prize after collecting 350 kilograms of plastic. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Dust storm blankets Kuwait's landmarks



KUWAIT: A blanket of dust covers Kuwait City as weather instability continued Sunday. The Ministry of Interior had cautioned against a prevailing unsteady weather marked with a wave of dust that lowered visibility. The Kuwait Meteorological Department had released a weather warning of scattered rain that might be thundery at times associated with fresh wind that might exceed 50 km/h causing drop in horizontal visibility due to dust over some areas and sea waves height exceed six feet. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

Zain shares joys of girgian with children, families

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, shared the joys of girgian with children and their families as part of its social campaign during the holy month of Ramadan. The company celebrated the beautiful Kuwaiti tradition at Murouj and Shaheed Park.

Zain's contributions came under its Ramadan social campaign, through which the company aims at sharing the joys and blessings of the holy month with all segments of the society, including children and youth who are the community's most vibrant segment. Zain celebrated the special occasion with them and their families in an atmosphere filled with happiness and joy.

After a halt of two years due to the pandemic, the company celebrated girgian with the public once again by giving away Zain's girgian to crowds at Murouj and Shaheed Park. Zain utilized an innovative way to distribute girgian to children by installing a unique smart device that delivers sweets once a child sings to it, simulating the beautiful traditions of the Kuwaiti community in a modern tech-themed way.

Zain has always been keen on organizing interactive social initiatives during Ramadan to recognize and support the various segments of the Kuwaiti community, reflecting Islamic values and humanitarian principles to enrich the art of giving and strengthen bonding between community members.

Zain's Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility campaign during the holy month of Ramadan includes an extensive array of programs that covers different areas. The initiatives and programs include humanitarian, voluntary, cultural, religious, sports, and recreational programs.



KUWAIT: Zain's team during the event.



Zain's girgian delighted the children.

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News in brief

Kuwait Amir condoles
with Kenyan President

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir of Kuwait Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah sent Sunday a cable of condolences to Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta on the demise of former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki, wishing his family solace. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar condoling cables.

Amir offers condolences
over Nigeria blast victims

KUWAIT: His Highness the Amir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah expressed condolences on Sunday to Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari over the victims of the oil refinery blast in Rivers state South Nigeria. In the cable, His Highness the Amir expressed his deepest condolences to the victims' families and wished the injured a fast recovery. His Highness the Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and His Highness the Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah sent similar cables.

Kuwait decries terrorist
attacks in Afghanistan

KUWAIT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kuwait strongly denounced the recent spate of deadly terrorist attacks on educational facilities and mosques in Afghanistan. The Ministry reiterated Kuwait's unequivocal rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism, renewing the call for the international community to double effort to eradicate the menace of terrorism. It expressed solidarity with the Afghan people and sincere condolences for the families of the victims of the attacks, wishing the wounded quick recovery. Dozens of people were killed or injured in the bomb attacks on the Mumtaz Education Center and Abdul-Rahim Shahid High School in Kabul, capital of Afghanistan, and on two mosques in Mazar-i-Sharif and Kunduz cities.

Kuwait Heritage



KUWAIT: A picture dated to the early 1960s shows Al-Falfa market which sold animal feed that was imported from Basra. (Source: Collection of Ali Al-Rais, center of research and studies on Kuwait, 2017. Prepared by Mahmoud Zakaria Abu Alella, heritage researcher at the Ministry of Information).

KFH participates in
iftar initiative in Jordan

KUWAIT: As part of its Ramadan campaign "Increase good deeds in Ramadan", Kuwait Red Crescent Society has held, with the support and finance from Kuwait Finance House (KFH), the Iftar initiative in the Jordanian capital Amman. Iftar included 1000 families. Eid clothes were distributed in the form of purchase coupons. Entertainment and educational events were organized for children and gifts were presented to them.

This initiative comes as part of KFH's voluntary human and social efforts which were extended inside and outside Kuwait through a series of joint fruitful cooperation programs with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, thus aiming to lift the suffering of

certain needy society segments.

In cooperation with Jordan Red Crescent Society and in coordination with the Kuwait Red Crescent Society, KFH's voluntary team has prepared and distributed meals to the needy people and shared with them the Ramadan Iftar Meal through the Group Iftar Initiative.

Commenting on KFH's social role, KFH's Senior Manager - Social Media and Public Relations Services, Abdullah Al-Saif said that "The initiatives which we perform during the holy month of Ramadan are part of our cooperation with the Kuwait and Jordan Red Crescent. They comprise the preparation and distribution of 15,000 Iftar meals during



Ramadan, distribution of Eid clothing to needy families, organizing other events and the distribution of food baskets in the beginning of the month"

As part of the strategic partnership between the two parties KFH supports the Kuwait Red Crescent Society to execute aid and medical projects in Jordan in cooperation with the Jordan Red Crescent Society. The agreement includes supporting winter clothing initiatives, medical aid, participation of Kuwaiti doctors in surgical operations, provision of one year food supply, a clinic, covering the medication costs of cancer patients from the Syrian refugees and Gaza citizens in Jordan and other social activities.

Kuwait extends aid to displaced people in Yemen



MARIB: Displaced Yemenis receive food aid donated by a Kuwaiti charitable organization, on the outskirts of the northeastern city of Marib, on April 23, 2022. —AFP photos



Japan finds four from missing boat

Wife of Assange urges UK to block his extradition



KYIV, Ukraine: Worshippers receive a sanctification during an Orthodox Easter service in front of St. Volodymyr's Cathedral in Kyiv on April 24, 2022, two months after the start of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

Ukraine marks grim Orthodox Easter

‘It’s very important that evil be judged in The Hague tribunal’

LYMAN, Ukraine: Ukrainians on Sunday marked a sombre Orthodox Easter two months into Russia's invasion, with many braving bombardment for blessings and others mourning their loved ones. Under the rain at a military position in the eastern town of Lyman, on the frontline, soldiers greeted each other with “Christ has risen!”

Dozens of policemen arrived at the town's small Orthodox church, some in bulletproof jackets, and one carrying a large cardboard box of traditional Easter cakes to be blessed with holy water by the priest. They joined dozens of civilians who had gathered to pray from dawn, the sound of artillery fire resounding throughout the singing of the psalms.

“If we make the wrong choices then darkness will ruin us, as darkness is destroying us during this war,” the priest said in his sermon. “We are thankful for the humanitarian aid and the community taking care of the displaced,” he added. The war in Ukraine has killed thousands and forced millions to flee their homes since Russia invaded on February 24. In the town of Bucha outside the capital, people mourned their dead after Russia withdrew late last month after weeks of devastating occupation. A row of people with their heads bowed, some crying, paid their respects before the communal grave behind St Andrews Church.

‘We need rays of hope’

“Today is a sunny day-like spring-and we have a hope that everything will end soon and our army will kick the invaders out of our country,” said Lyubov Kravtsova, 59, fighting back tears. But “still this is very hard for me,” she added, noting the terror and deprivation of the Russian occupation.

People stood shoulder-to-shoulder in a row outside the church, carrying wicker baskets of Easter food. St Andrew's priest Andrii Holovine greeted the faithful and sprinkled them with holy water. “Our people live under bombing and shelling, with tears, grief and sorrow-but we need rays of hope. And this holiday gives us hope,” Holovine told AFP.

But forgiveness for the horrors that happened in Bucha-and are still happening elsewhere in Ukraine-was still a long way off, he said. “It's very important



Easter cakes blessed with holy water

that evil be judged in The Hague tribunal and all war criminals be named.”

In the eastern city of Kharkiv near the Russian border, around 50 people had braved possible bombardment to attend mass at the Gvardiysiv Shironitsiv Church. Stanislas, 35, had come to pray with his wife and 18-month-old daughter, carrying a round loaf of sweet bread covered in white icing and sprinkled with multicoloured hundreds and thousands. “I hope for better days, when we can again fire up the barbecue,” said the baker, whose shop was destroyed by a

Russian rocket.

Nadwya, an elderly lady in a purple and white woolly hat, carried two Easter cakes she had baked. “I just want to be able to sleep properly,” she said, after weeks of relentless bombardment.

‘Feeling of security’

Andrey Golovchenko, a civilian helping out in the church, said more people came to the sanctuary these days than before the war, and not just to receive aid. He said he hoped for Ukraine's “rapid victory”.

On the other side of the country, in the western city of Lviv, a husband and wife in their Sunday best walked towards a packed church, the latter holding a basket covered in an embroidered cloth. Outside the Bernardine Church in the city near the Polish border, 27-year-old Yuliya listened to the service from the courtyard with a friend.

“We have war now, and it is especially important to follow our traditions,” she said. Across the vast country a day earlier, people had made preparations, however modest. In the eastern city of Severodonetsk, on the frontline, Ukrainian troops had hidden three large Easter breads covered in icing under a bridge, among their small stock of water bottles, cereal bars and Kalshnikovs.

In Slovyansk, to the west, residents dropped by the cathedral for a quick blessing, then hopped back on bikes and sped off, as the boom of artillery fire resounded in the distance. Paisiy, a 34-year-old priest, said he had stayed in the city because it was his job. “People are afraid and when they come here and see the priest, it brings them a feeling of security,” he said. —AFP

China COVID death toll rises as Beijing warns of ‘grim’ situation

SHANGHAI, China: Shanghai reported 39 COVID deaths Sunday, its highest daily toll despite weeks of lockdowns, while China's capital Beijing warned of a “grim” situation with rising infections. The world's second-largest economy has been struggling to stamp out its worst outbreak in two years with a playbook of harsh lockdowns and mass testing as it sticks to a strict zero-COVID policy, taking a heavy toll on businesses and public morale.

The cosmopolitan business hub of Shanghai has been almost entirely locked down since the start of the month, snarling supply chains, with many residents confined to their homes for even longer as it became the epicentre of the outbreak.

China's biggest city only announced its first fatalities from the outbreak on April 18, despite reporting thousands of cases each day in recent weeks. It reported 39 more deaths on Sunday, National Health Commission data showed, bringing its total toll to 87, while the country logged nearly

22,000 new local virus cases.

Shanghai's previous highest daily toll since lockdown was 12, reported a day earlier. The city of 25 million has struggled to provide fresh food to those confined at home, while patients have reported trouble accessing regular medical care as thousands of health staff were deployed for Covid testing and treatment.

Health officials have warned of the particular risks of COVID to the country's older and largely unvaccinated population, saying the average age among fatalities in Shanghai's outbreak was 81. Five of those who died had been vaccinated, though authorities have said the deaths involved people who had severe underlying diseases and who were in critical condition. Doubts have been raised over the efficacy of China's homegrown vaccines, and Beijing has not imported any foreign-made jabs.

Online backlash

Censors have battled to scrub an online backlash against the prolonged lockdown in Shanghai, including the rapid censorship of a viral video by residents outlining their daily challenges to eat and access essential services. On Saturday evening, a residential building fire sparked fear and criticism on social media, given that many exits in compounds have generally been sealed as part of

wear masks outside.

“We are still recording continuous eruptions with thick clouds towering at between 500 to 3,000 metres from the peak,” Deny Mardiono of Indonesia's Geological Agency told AFP. Anak Krakatoa has erupted at least 21 times in recent weeks but Sunday's eruption was the largest yet, Mardiono said.

Authorities ordered people to stay out of a two-kilometre exclusion zone around the volcano, which is currently graded at level two of Indonesia's four-tiered volcanic alert system. “People, including tourists, should adhere to the recommendation from the Geological Agency, which prohibits anyone to be within a two-kilometre radius from the



SHANGHAI, China: Health workers (C) walk along a street past a group of neighbourhood residents (R) waiting for a bus during the COVID-19 lockdown in the Jing'an district in Shanghai on April 24, 2022. —AFP

COVID controls.

Meanwhile 22 more infections were reported in Beijing on Sunday, with the capital locking down one downtown housing compound as officials warned the situation was “grim and complex”. Health official Pang Xinghuo said preliminary observations suggested COVID had been “spreading invisibly” in the city for a week, “increasing the difficulty of prevention and control”. —AFP

crater,” he added.

The volcano has been sporadically active since it emerged from the sea at the beginning of last century in the caldera formed after the 1883 eruption of Mount Krakatoa. That disaster was one of the deadliest and most destructive in history with an estimated 35,000 people killed.

Anak Krakatoa last erupted in 2018, generating a tsunami that killed 429 people and left thousands homeless. Indonesia, a Southeast Asian archipelago nation, sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire where the meeting of continental plates causes high volcanic and seismic activity. The country has nearly 130 active volcanoes. —AFP

Indonesia's Anak Krakatoa volcano erupts, spews ash

JAKARTA, Indonesia: The offspring of Indonesia's infamous Krakatoa volcano erupted on Sunday, spewing a towering volcanic ash cloud some 3,000 metres (9,800 feet) into the sky. Mount Anak Krakatoa, which means Child of Krakatoa, belched thick ash over the strait that separates the islands of Java and Sumatra forcing authorities to warn nearby residents to

Nigerian oil blast kills at least 80

LAGOS: An explosion at an illegal oil refinery in southern Nigeria has killed at least 80 people, the emergency services said Sunday. The blast occurred late Friday at the illegal site between the southern oil states of Rivers and Imo, police said.

“We recovered at least 80 badly burnt bodies at the scene,” Ifeanyi Nnaji of the National Emergency Management Agency in the area, told AFP, adding that the toll could rise. “We learnt many bodies are in nearby bushes and forests as some illegal operators and their patrons scammed to safety.”

Many people had “severe burns”, he said, adding some later died in hospital. Nnaji said several burnt vehicles and jerry-cans used in scooping stolen crude and petroleum products littered the scene of the carnage.

Local media said more than 100 people, mostly youths, were burnt to death. Police confirmed the explosion happened late Friday at the site of an illegal refinery where operators and their patrons had gathered for business but did not provide figures on how many died.

Idris Musa, head of the of state-run National Oil Spills Detection and Response Agency told AFP an investigation was under way. He said the explosion “claimed several lives, especially those engaged in illegal oil refining and bunkering”.

An NGO in the oil-producing Niger delta said corpses of the victims littered the area, but could not immediately say how many were killed. “Several bodies burnt beyond recognition lay on the ground while others who may have attempted to run for safety are seen hanging on some tree branches,” said Fyneface Dumnemene, executive director of Youths and Environmental Advocacy Centre.

Hundreds of illegal refineries

The incident is the latest to hit oil-rich Nigeria in recent years. Pipeline fires are commonplace in Nigeria, in part because of poor maintenance but also because of thieves who vandalise pipelines to siphon off petrol and sell it on the black market.

Crude oil is tapped from a web of pipelines owned by major oil companies and refined into products in makeshift tanks. According to industry sources, Nigeria loses around 200,000 barrels of crude to oil thieves, vandals and illegal refining operators daily.

Most people in the Niger delta live in poverty even though the country is the biggest oil producer on the continent, with output of around two million barrels per day. Hundreds have been killed in the past due to stealing and illegal refining known locally as bunkering.

The worst pipeline blast in Nigeria happened in southern town of Jesse in October 1998, leaving over 1,000 villagers dead. The government has deployed the military to raid and destroy illegal refineries in the Niger delta as part of measures to stop stealing. —AFP



ANYER, Indonesia: A man fishes at Pasauran beach, Anyer in Serang on April 24, 2022 while Mount Anak Krakatau spews thick smoke into the air. —AFP

International

Wife of Assange urges UK to block his extradition

Final decision now rests with interior minister Priti Patel

BRUSSELS: Stella Assange, wife of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, urged the British government on Saturday not to sign his extradition order to the US, saying his fate will have repercussions throughout Europe. A UK court on Wednesday issued a formal order to extradite the WikiLeaks founder to face trial in the United States over the publication of secret files relating to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.



There is
no excuse

The final decision now rests with interior minister Priti Patel, although Assange could yet appeal. "This is a political case, it has always been a political case," Stella Assange told AFP on the margins of a demonstration in support of her husband in Brussels. "The trick that has been played by the various governments the UK Government, the Australian Government, the US government, is to say it's before the courts," she added.

"Now that the UK courts have issued the extradition order, there is no excuse. It is squarely in the political

domain." The ruling Wednesday by a magistrate in central London brings the long-running legal saga in the UK courts closer to a conclusion. But Assange's lawyers have until May 18 to make representations to Patel and could potentially launch further appeals on other points in the case.

'Democratic values at stake'

The case has become a cause celebre for media freedom, with Julian Assange's supporters accusing Washington of trying to muzzle reporting of legitimate security concerns. Washington wants to put him on trial in connection with the publication of 500,000 secret military files relating to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Stella Assange said the grounds to appeal against extradition in the United Kingdom are very narrow, "with the treaty heavily tilted in favour of the United States". The matters being raised "go to the heart of what it means to have a free and open society of having a free press", she said, and raised the possibility of taking the matter to the European Court of Human Rights if necessary.

"It is the soul of European values-of democratic values-that is at stake," she added. "Julian has been in Belmarsh prison now for three years. He is in an increasingly weakened state of health. He had a mini-stroke in October." The British government "is condemning war crimes in Ukraine, but it is going to show whether it is prepared to extradite a journalist for having exposed war crimes", she said. — AFP



BRUSSELS, Belgium: People take part in a demonstration in support of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange who is facing extradition to the USA in Brussels. — AFP

Slovenians vote in divisive elections

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia: Slovenians voted on Sunday in parliamentary elections expected to be a tight race between conservative Prime Minister Janez Jansa and a political newcomer in the polarised EU country. Jansa, 63, an ally of nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and admirer of US ex-president Donald Trump, is polling head-to-head with Robert Golob, former chief of a leading power company.

Wearing a tie in the national colours of Ukraine, blue and yellow, Jansa cast his vote in his village of Arnace in the northwest, shortly after polling stations opened at

7:00 am (0500 GMT). "Turnout will certainly be high and that is good.... I hope that we will continue along the path that was set," Jansa told reporters. The three-time premier has campaigned on promises of stability, while analysts say concerns over the rule of law have boosted the opposition in the Alpine ex-Yugoslav state with a population of about two million. "Elections will decide how will Slovenia develop not only in the next four years but also during the whole next decade since many projects have been set up," Jansa said.

'Breaking point'

Tens of thousands of people have attended regular anti-government rallies, accusing Jansa of authoritarianism since he took power in March 2020. Billing the elections as a "referendum on democracy", the opposition accuses Jansa of trying to undermine democratic institu-

tions and press freedoms like his ally Orban in neighbouring Hungary.

"If this pace continues, we will be very close to that (tightening of state control like in Hungary and Poland) in four years," Uros Esih, a columnist at one of Slovenia's leading dailies Delo, told AFP. He said the elections represented a "breaking point" with "liberal and illiberal political forces clashing" in Slovenia. "I hope the situation will change... It is obvious that most of the people are not satisfied with this government and the way it's governing," Sara Rigler, a 21-year-old psychology student, told AFP at a polling station in the capital.

The ascendancy of 55-year-old Golob began when he took over a small Green party in January, renaming it Freedom Movement (GS). The last poll from late Friday showed GS at more than 27 percent of the popular vote, slightly ahead of Jansa's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) with 24 percent, though analysts warn numerous voters may make last-minute decisions.

Golob also has the backing of several centre-left opposition parties, while Jansa, even with centre-right allies, looks unlikely to be able to secure a majority in the 90-seat parliament.

'Important' elections

Analysts expect an increased turnout of 60 percent—about 10 percentage points more than for the 2018 polls—with voters turning against Jansa's style. His image in the last two years has also been hurt by rows with Brussels over his moves to suspend funding to the national news agency and drag out the appointment of prosecutors to the bloc's new anti-graft body.

Though Jansa was among the first foreign leaders to travel to Kyiv, on March 15, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Moscow's assault has not taken centre stage in Slovenia's election campaign. "These elections are absolutely important... I hope and wish that this government stays. It has been doing a great job," priest Andrej Mazej told AFP at the voting station in Jansa's village.

Jansa already served as prime minister between 2004 and 2008, and 2012-2013. Only a year into his second term as premier, he was forced out by a corruption scandal. Polls close at 7:00 pm (1700 GMT) with exit polls due shortly thereafter. The polls would decide "between democracy and autocracy", wrote Igor Krsinar, a columnist for Reporter Magazine, a rare critical conservative voice. — AFP

Iraqi Christians celebrate first Easter 'Holy Fire'

BASHIQA, Iraq: With joyous ululations, thousands of Iraqis have celebrated for the first time the arrival of the "Holy Fire" brought from Christianity's holiest site in Jerusalem to mark Orthodox Easter. With chanting and prayers, excited crowds gathered Saturday night to greet the flame's arrival at the Syriac Christian Orthodox Mar Matta monastery of Saint Matthew, about 28 kilometres (17 miles) from the war-ravaged city of Mosul in northern Iraq.

"It is a message of peace and love for all... a message of resurrection for this bruised country, so that it can regain its strength, its security and its peace," Bishop Timathos Moussa Shamani, of the Mar Matta monastery, told AFP. The flame had been taken earlier Saturday from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem—where Christian tradition says Jesus was crucified, buried and resurrected. According to believers, the fire descends from heaven on the eve of Easter, and is a symbol of Christ's Resurrection.

From Jerusalem it was carried in a special lantern to Jordan, before being flown to Iraq—a method that is used every year to take the flame to other Orthodox communities, including Greece. For the first time, the flame came directly to Iraq. To calls of "halleluia" and the clanging of cymbals, the lantern arrived carried by a bishop into the church at the monastery.

'Historic'

Celebrating crowds packed the courtyard and monastery church, where worshippers, monks and priests leaned forward to kiss the lantern and receive the blessing they believe the fire grants them.

The crowds then lit candles from the flickering flame, filling the church with light. "It's a historic day," said Saad Youssef, a 60-year-old teacher. The region is home to one of the world's oldest Christian communities, but believers were hit hard under the onslaught of the Islamic State group (IS), who forced hundreds of thousands of Christians to flee.—AFP



LJUBLJANA, Slovenia: A woman casts her ballot at a polling station during a general election in Ljubljana on April 24, 2022. — AFP

Themes of Quran: Signs of God...

Continued from Page 1

we can acquire and share knowledge, He has also satisfied our social needs for love, family and belonging. His intention for our relationships is clear: tranquility, affection and mercy. These are just a few of the "signs" of a powerful, generous, caring Creator. Compared to these great feats, there is little we can do to return such favors and blessings.

However, as the verses imply, we should at least be grateful and, by doing so, acknowledge God and

believe in Him. If you need a little help along the way, the Quran will guide you. It is described at the outset of chapter 14 as "A Book We have send down to you so that you [Muhammad] may bring humanity out of darkness into the light by the permission of their Lord." The Quran is one of the greatest signs of God—truly a miracle of miracles.

Courtesy of the TIES Center: As one of the projects funded and managed by Kuwait Society for Cultural Dialogue, TIES aims at empowering Kuwait's expats through social and educational services that promote a positive and productive role in society, and to facilitate opportunities for intra- and interfaith interactions that promote social solidarity. For more information, please call 25231015/6 or e-mail: info@tiescenter.net.

the victims. The relatives of the victims and the missing lashed out at the country's leaders. "The people of Tripoli are destined to die," said Nissrine Merheb who hasn't heard from her two cousins and their three children since the sinking.

"Even when we are trying to run away from the filth of politicians and their corruption... death catches up with us." Lebanon, which has a "turnback" agreement with Cyprus to prevent crossings, is in the grips of an unprecedented financial crisis, with the currency losing more than 90 percent of its value and the majority of the population living below the poverty line.

The economic crash has spurred an uptick in sea crossings out, with an increasing number of Lebanese joining the ranks of Syrian and Palestinian refugees trying to illegally cross into Europe. The UN refugee agency says at least 1,570 people, 186 of them Lebanese, left or tried to leave illegally by sea from Lebanon between January and November 2021. Most were hoping to reach European Union member Cyprus, an island 175 kilometers away. This is up from 270 passengers in 2019.—AFP

First flight out of Yemen since...

Continued from Page 1

UN special envoy Hans Grundberg voiced concern and called on the warring parties to work with his office "to find a solution that allows the flights to resume as planned." A renewable two-month truce that went into effect in early April "is meant to benefit civilians including through reducing violence, making fuel available, and improving their freedom of movement to, from and within their country," Grundberg said.

Trading blame

The plane, operated by national carrier Yemenia, was expected to take off from the government-controlled southern port city of Aden, stop off in Sanaa, and transport passengers in need of medical treatment to Jordan's capital Amman. But hours before the flight, the airline said "it has not yet received operating permits".

Yemenia said it hoped "all problems will be overcome in the near future", without specifying a date. There was no immediate reaction from the military coalition that controls Yemen's airspace. But Yemen's Information Minister Moammar Al-Eryani said the Houthis were responsible for the flight being scrapped, Yemen's official Saba news agency reported.

Eryani accused the Houthis of trying to take advantage of the flights to "smuggle" members of Lebanese militant group Hezbollah and Iran's Revolutionary Guards onto the plane using "fake names and forged documents." While the government had approved 104 passengers, the Houthis "refused" and insisted on adding 60 more "passengers with unreliable passports," he added.

The flight "faltering due to the Houthi terrorist militia's non-compliance with the agreement stipulating the approval of passports issued by the legitimate government," Eryani said. The Saudi-led coalition accuses Iran and Hezbollah of smuggling weapons to the rebels and sending operatives to Yemen to train them to use drones and ballistic missiles against the government and against Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, another member of the coalition.

In Houthi-controlled Sanaa, airport director Khaled Al-Shayef said the passports issue was a "baseless justification" for barring the flight. The deputy head of civil aviation Raed Talib Jabal said the coalition's refusal to allow Sunday's flight was "a violation of the truce". "The coalition insists that the Yemeni people remain in a large prison," he added.

Sick passengers stranded

The flight postponement was a setback for a truce deal that has provided a rare respite from violence in much of the country, and has also seen fuel tankers begin arriving at the port of Hodeida, potentially easing fuel shortages in Sanaa and elsewhere.

The Houthis seized control of Sanaa in 2014, prompting the Saudi-led military intervention to support the government the following year, igniting a war that has caused what the United Nations terms the world's worst humanitarian crisis. The airport in Houthi-controlled Sanaa has been closed to commercial traffic since August 2016 when airstrikes disrupted service to the city.

Aid flights continue to land in Sanaa, although service has periodically halted. The pause of commercial flights has prevented "thousands of sick Yemeni civilians from seeking urgent medical treatment outside the country," humanitarian groups CARE and the Norwegian Refugee Council said last August. They also cited "economic losses estimated to be in the billions." Daily flights out of Aden as well as the eastern city of Seiyun fly both domestically and to other countries in the region.—AFP

Migrant ship capsizes off...

Continued from Page 1

silenced and carried off by a crowd of survivors' relatives. Last November, a boat carrying dozens of would-be migrants also sank off Tripoli's coast after being chased by the Lebanese army. The passengers were rescued and towed back to shore.

'Destined to die'

The latest incident stoked public anger in Tripoli, Lebanon's second city and one of its poorest. Growing poverty and unemployment rates have turned Tripoli into a launchpad for illegal migrants. Calls circulated on social media networks for protests outside the Tripoli home of prime minister Najib Mikati, who declared Monday a day of national mourning to grieve

International

India PM Modi holds first public event in Kashmir since clampdown

Police say violence has declined since Kashmir's status was changed

SRINAGAR, India: India's prime minister promised peace and development for Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, during his first public event in the disputed territory since it imposed a sweeping security clampdown nearly three years ago.

Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government has sought to quell a long-running insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir and strengthen its hold over the Muslim-majority region, which is also claimed by neighbouring Pakistan.

India nullified the area's limited autonomy in August 2019, when authorities arrested thousands and imposed the world's longest internet shutdown, seeking to forestall local opposition to the move. Tight security was in place for Modi's appearance at Pelli village in Jammu, the Hindu-majority southern part of the territory, which celebrated New Delhi's introduction of direct rule as a defence against Kashmir's separatist movement.

As he inaugurated new road and hydropower projects, Modi told the gathered crowd of thousands that his government had put the restive region on the path to prosperity. "I want to tell the youth of the valley that they will not have to face the difficulties and travails that their parents

and grandparents had to deal with," Modi said.

Sunday's event marked Panchayati Raj, a day that commemorates grassroots democracy—although Kashmir has been without an elected regional government since 2018. Its last chief minister was detained during the clampdown and only released more than a year later.

Modi's government has long said its decision to end Kashmir's limited autonomy was aimed at fostering a lasting peace and bringing investment into the troubled region, where tens of thousands of people have been killed over the years.

Today, it is the most militarised part of India, with more than half a million soldiers and paramilitaries deployed across the fractious territory. Police say violence has declined since Kashmir's status was changed, but almost 1,000 people have been killed since 2019 — among them soldiers, militants and civilians.

Young men continue to join rebel groups that have fought Indian rule of Kashmir for more than three decades. Militants threw grenades at a bus carrying security forces on Friday, killing an officer, in an incident around 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the venue of Modi's public appearance. Two suspected rebels were killed in the ensuing fire-fight with security forces. —AFP



MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan: Pakistani Kashmiri protesters take part in a demonstration in Muzaaffarabad on April 24, 2022, against the visit of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Jammu and Kashmir. —AFP

Japan finds four from missing boat

TOKYO: Japanese rescuers said Sunday they had found four people from a sightseeing boat that went missing a day earlier with 26 on board after warning it was sinking in frigid northern waters. They were found shortly after 5 am (2000 GMT) off the Shiretoko Peninsula in northern Hokkaido prefecture, a coastguard spokesman told AFP, but no immediate information was available on their condition.

"They are being transported to seek medical attention," the spokesman said. "Other details are not yet clear." The "Kazu 1" was sailing in the icy waters off the peninsula, a world heritage site recognised for its pristine nature, when it sent a distress signal at 1:13 pm (0413 GMT) on Saturday, saying its bow was flooded and that the vessel was sinking.

The coastguard sent seven vessels and five aircraft for the search and rescue mission Sunday, joined by police and military helicopters as well as other local fishing boats. National broadcaster NHK showed footage of a helicopter landing in a field and at least one person being brought out on a stretcher to a waiting ambulance.

Three of those found were in waters near the northern tip of the peninsula, while the fourth was in a rocky area on the coast, NHK said. The boat was carrying 24 passengers, including two children, and two crew, and encountered high waves and strong winds on Saturday, according to officials.

The daytime water temperature in the area was around two to three degrees Celsius, and some local fishing boats returned to port early because of poor weather, local reports said. The Kazu 1 ran aground in shallow water in June last year, becoming stranded with 21 passengers and two crew members on board, according to Japanese media.

The boat was able to leave the shallows on its own and returned to the port, but police investigated its captain for endangering traffic by negligence in the conduct of business. The Shiretoko Peninsula was designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 2005. It is well known for its unique wildlife, including the endangered Steller sea lion, as well as migratory birds and brown bears.

Sightseeing boat trips in the area are popular for visitors hoping to spot whales, birds and other wildlife, as well as drift ice in the winter. Japan's borders remain closed to tourists because of Covid-19 rules, so sightseeing in the country is effectively limited to residents and Japanese citizens.

Japan's coastguard has been involved in a variety of search and rescue missions around the archi-



SHARI, Japan: Rescue personnel hold up material to shield a stretcher from media, as they make a transfer from a helicopter to a waiting ambulance at a schoolfield in Shari, Okhotsk Subprefecture of Hokkaido on April 24, 2022. —AFP

pelago, including the successful discovery last November of a 69-year-old man who spent 22 hours drifting in open water off southwestern Kagoshima.

In September 2020, a cargo ship with 43 crew onboard sunk after being caught in a typhoon off Japan's southwest coast. Two survivors were rescued, while a third crew member was found unresponsive and declared dead. The search operation was called off a week later. —AFP



PYONGYANG, North Korea: File picture shows citizens offering flowers to the bronze statues of former leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il on the Day of the Sun, the 110th birth anniversary of late North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, in Pyongyang. —AFP

further indicates an upcoming event," Martyn Williams, a fellow at the Stimson Center, wrote on the 38 North website.

US and South Korean officials and analysts have also warned Pyongyang could resume nuclear weapons testing for the first time since 2017, citing renewed activity at its key testing site. —AFP

Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages also rebuked the prime minister's office for not having all video streams on their official Facebook page subtitled or dubbed in French.

According to recent opinion polls, more than 90 percent of Canadians strongly support bilingualism, which they consider to be a part of Canadian culture, but less than 20 percent are fluent in both languages. "Everyone must be able to be served in their preferred language since few Canadians are truly bilingual," says Stephanie Chouinard, a political science professor at the Royal Military College of Canada.

But, she adds, Canadians "have been waiting for the modernization of the Official Languages Act since 2019." Beaulac, the law professor, notes that "for a long time, to defend French meant you were flagged as separatist." "Things have changed today, so people are more daring to challenge the domination of English."

Referring to the recent CN appointments, linguistic law professor Frederic Berard explains that "people are angry, shocked, and this anger is justified." "However, today this kind of situation is relatively rare," especially in Quebec, adds Berard, who chaired Canada's national consultations on the reform of official languages.

But the situation is much more complex for Francophones who do not live in Quebec, he adds, even if there have been advances in recent years. —AFP

Australia accuses China of paying bribes to win deals

SYDNEY: Australia's defence minister on Sunday accused China of paying bribes to win international deals but refused to say if the corruption extended to Beijing's newly signed defence pact with the Solomon Islands.

Peter Dutton made the remarks as his conservative government faced questions in the run-up to May 21 general elections about how China apparently outmanoeuvred Australia by securing the agreement. The deal shocked the Solomon Islands' traditional allies Australia and the United States, which fear it may give China a military foothold in the South Pacific less than 2,000 kilometres (1,200 miles) from Australia's coast.

"The Chinese don't play by our rules," Dutton said. "If you look at what has happened in Africa, there are corrupt payments being made," he told Sky News Australia. "We can never compete with that sort of playbook. We have values and we have the rule of law that we abide by."

Asked specifically if he believed corrupt payments were made to forge China's deal with the Solomon Islands, which was announced by Beijing on April 19, the minister said he could not comment. "The reality is that China has changed," he added.

"China's incredibly aggressive acts of foreign interference, the preparedness to pay bribes to beat other countries to deals: that's the reality of modern China." A draft of the pact shocked countries in the region when it was leaked last month, particularly measures that would allow Chinese naval deployments to the Solomons.

Senior opposition Labor Party MP Jim Chalmers accused Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government of "undermining our national security with all of this chest-beating on China at the same time as their incompetence has meant that China is setting up on our doorstep".

A White House delegation visited the Solomon Islands capital Honiara on Friday to warn of repercussions if China was to establish a permanent military presence in the Pacific nation under the new agreement. The White House said the officials had told Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare that the recently signed pact had "potential regional security implications" for Washington and its allies.

'No military base'

"If steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the delegation noted that the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly," the White House said in a statement.

National Security Council Indo-Pacific Coordinator Kurt Campbell and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink led the delegation, which also included Pentagon officials. According to the White House statement, "Sogavare reiterated his specific assurances that there would be no military base, no long-term presence, and no power projection capability, as he has said publicly".

Sogavare's government severed ties with Taiwan in September 2019 in favour of diplomatic relations with China, unlocking investment but stoking inter-island rivalries. Last November, protests against Sogavare's rule sparked violent riots in the capital, during which much of the city's Chinatown was torched.

While the unrest was partly fuelled by poverty and unemployment, anti-China sentiment was also cited as playing a role. When asked about China's influence in the Pacific, Australia's prime minister told reporters Friday that Beijing was exerting "enormous pressure" on leaders of Pacific island nations. Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian in turn accused "Australian politicians" of "coercive diplomacy" in the region. —AFP

N Korea boasts of 'invincible power' ahead of anniversary

SEOUL: North Korea's state media boasted Sunday that its armed forces had "gained invincible power" under leader Kim Jong Un as it prepares for a major army holiday that analysts say could be marked with a military parade or major weapons test.

North Korea on Monday celebrates the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Revolutionary Army and the nuclear-armed country has staged military parades in the past to mark key holidays. Pyongyang has carried out more than a dozen weapons tests this year, including firing an intercontinental ballistic missile at full range for the first time since 2017.

A report by the North's official Korean Central News Agency listed the history of the country's military achievements, from its battles against the United States in the 1950-53 Korean War to smaller conflicts. "All the people of the country are looking back deeply on the history of the 100 victory of our revolutionary armed forces," it said.

The report added Kim had further propelled the country's military might with his "genius military ideology, excellent military command and unparalleled courage and guts". "Our revolutionary armed forces have gained invincible power that the world cannot ignore," it said, in an apparent reference to the North's nuclear arsenal.

Signs that Pyongyang was preparing for its "biggest ever military parade" to mark the upcoming anniversary have been detected, Yonhap news agency reported, citing multiple unnamed government sources.

The parade was likely to take place at midnight, the report said, involving around 20,000 troops and the North's most sophisticated weaponry including the "monster" Hwasong-17 ICBM as well as hyper-sonic and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

North Korea had been widely expected to showcase its military strength to mark the 110th anniversary of the birth of its founding leader and Kim's grandfather Kim Il Sung on April 15, but instead, the day was celebrated with a civilian parade.

Satellite imagery has also shown continued preparations, with thousands of North Korean troops and scores of vehicles marching in formation at a parade training ground in Pyongyang. "Typically, troops depart the training ground as soon as the parade is complete, so their presence

by the situation with CN.

"French-speaking Canadians across the country should see themselves reflected in our major national institutions," said the bilingual prime minister, who also asked the responsible government ministers to ensure CN works quickly to rectify the situation.

The recent controversies are a reminder of the French language's precarious position in a North American ocean of English-speakers, as well as previous battles to protect its status as an official language, which has been included in the Canadian constitution since 1982. But according to some French language proponents in Canada, where the total population of 37 million contains 8 million francophones, the government has failed to meet expectations.

Less than 20% of Canadians are bilingual

"There is clearly a hypocrisy on the part of Trudeau," said Stephane Beaulac, a law professor and codirector of the University of Montreal's National Observatory on Linguistic Rights. He pointed out that while the prime minister is bothered by the CN saga, he chose last year to appoint a non-French speaker as Canada's governor general, who serves as Queen Elizabeth II's official representative in the country.

Mary Simon, originally from the Nunavik area in northern Quebec, is the first Indigenous Canadian to become governor general, but only speaks English and the Inuit language of Inuktitut. This week,

New controversies arise over French language in Canada

MONTREAL, Canada: Do French-speakers face discrimination in Canada, despite its status as an official language along with English? A string of recent leadership appointments and statements has revived the controversy over the French language's place in Canada, prompting a response from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

The latest blow: There are no longer any directors on the corporate board of Montreal-based CN, Canada's largest railway company, who speak French. The question of whether Canadian corporate leaders should be bilingual received a lot of attention last fall, after the president of Air Canada, Michael Rousseau, said he did not have the time to learn French. He had to publicly apologize for those remarks a few days later.

Under Canadian law, state-owned businesses, such as CN and Air Canada, as well as airports and federal ministries, are required to provide services in both French and English to clients. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said this week that he was frustrated

MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2022

Business

Egypt gig economy workers face rough ride amid rising pressures

‘They bleed you dry left and right, but there’s nothing else to do’

CAIRO: Young men on bikes and scooters zip through Cairo, Egypt’s sprawling megalopolis, dodging cars to deliver more than a million orders each day, with little physical or legal protection.

Egypt’s digital gig economy is growing, as economic pressures push more of its key demographic-educated, urban youth-into the work-on-demand model. Engineer Mohamed Sherif, 37, joined online food ordering company Talabat as a bicycle courier in Alexandria three months ago because he couldn’t find a job.

“They bleed you dry left and right, but there’s nothing else to do,” he told AFP. In early April, Talabat couriers called a two-day strike to demand higher wages, with only a fraction of the 12,000 workforce joining. The work stoppage reflected, however, the state of Egypt’s sizeable, app-based gig economy. Inflation has climbed to a three-year high of 12.1 percent while the Egyptian pound plunged to 18 percent of its value. The mounting economic hardships come as global commodity prices have soared following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

A courier who declined to be named said commissions have been stagnant since 2020 at 9-18 Egyptian pounds (50 cents and \$1). “You can work a nine or 10-hour shift, and just not get enough orders,” Sherif told AFP.

After paying for gas, oil and other expenses, “you could end up only making 30 or 40 pounds that day”.

In Egypt, where 60 percent of the 103-million-strong population are under 30 and 14.5 percent of university graduates are unemployed, digital labor platforms have attracted 100,000-200,000 workers.

Uber alone employed 90,000 drivers in 2019, all without contracts, insurance or social security.

‘Taking advantage of vulnerability’

Fairwork, a project by the University of Oxford, worked with the American University in Cairo to rate the working conditions of seven of Egypt’s largest digital labor platforms. Uber, Talabat and grocery app Mongez scored one out of 10, while ridesharing startup Swvl—which made headlines for its \$1.5 billion Nasdaq debut earlier this year—scored just three out of 10.

Omar Ramadan, whose home maintenance and cleaning services startup FilKhedma rated highest at five out of 10, said working conditions are seldom discussed in the tech ecosystem. “It’s very rare to talk about how much we’re paying people, if this is fair or not, if we’re taking advantage of people’s vulnerability.”

A third of Egyptians live in poverty, and nearly the same number are vulnerable to falling into poverty, the World Bank says. The average family’s monthly income is 6,000 EGP (\$325). Following the strike this month, Talabat said in a statement that couriers earned around



CAIRO: A delivery worker rides his motorbike in the Egyptian capital Cairo during the holy month of Ramadan. — AFP

4,000-6,000 EGP per month, and up to 10,000 EGP “if they work eight hours or more”.

But couriers say this excludes the cost of petrol—which has gone up by three percent in recent days—and paying for and servicing the scooter or bicycle they use. Couriers using motorcycles earn up to twice as much as those making their deliveries by bicycles or on foot, said Sherif.

A legal grey area

Couriers also put their lives at risk as they navigate the chaotic streets of Cairo, where traffic rules are more than often disrespected and accidents happen almost daily.

Talabat Egypt’s public affairs head Asmaa Khalil denied claims made by some couriers that they have no adequate insurance to protect them. According to her, Talabat pays into accident and life insurance, but the schemes are handled by external contractors that recruit and manage their couriers.

Bicycle courier Sherif criticized this method, calling it a way by employers “to get rid of the dirty work”. Khalil said that, legally, Talabat has “no obligations” towards its couriers and offers insurance and other benefits only “out of goodwill”. For Wael Tawfik of the Legal Collective to Promote Labor Awareness, the best

recourse for workers is to set up a trade union. But Sherif said it would be a tough task for couriers to set up a union because “unlike factory workers who all work in the same place, couriers only meet each other by coincidence”. Only 13.6 million people receive state-sponsored social security benefits in Egypt, where 63 percent of the workforce are employed in the informal economy, according to the International Labor Organization. “Employment law, tax law, social security, it’s all unclear how the gig economy is supposed to behave,” Ramadan said. “Everyone in the gig economy is in a grey area,” he added. — AFP



CBK to provide ATMs for ‘Eidiyah’ in shopping malls

KUWAIT: Due to the increasing demand on all KD denominations for distributing Eidiyah (monetary gift), the Central Bank of Kuwait (CBK) announced the provision of Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) in a number of shopping malls during the Eid.

In a statement, the CBK said that the ATMs

services shall be provided in The Avenues and 360 Mall from 24 April to 04 May 2022, in cooperation with the Kuwait Banking Association (KBA), the Shared Automated Banking Services Company (K-Net) and the aforementioned malls.

The CBK added that the service was well received among the public, who are now able to

obtain the various KD denominations, especially the smaller banknotes that are not usually available in other ATMs. The statement concluded that the CBK has already provided local banks with new banknotes of the aforementioned denominations so that they would be made available in banks’ branches in the country.

was promoted online. The dark side of the internet also includes e-commerce platforms filled with counterfeit or defective products.

For its part, the large digital business lobby CCIA said Saturday that “a number of important details” need to be “clarified” so “the final legislation allows all businesses, large and small, to comply with the rules in practice”. The regulation will require platforms to swiftly remove illegal content as soon as they are aware of its existence. Social networks would have to suspend users who frequently breach the law.

The DSA will force e-commerce sites to verify the identity of suppliers before proposing their products.

While many of the DSA’s stipulations cover all companies, it lays out special obligations for “very large platforms”, defined as those with more than 45 million active users in the European Union.

While the list of companies has not yet been released it will include giants such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft, as well as Twitter and probably the likes of TikTok, Zalando and Booking.com. These players will be obliged to assess the risks associated with the use of their services and remove illegal content. They will also be required to be more transparent about their data and algorithms.

‘A world first’

The initiative is “a world first in the field of digital regulation”, the European Council, which represents the

Boursa Kuwait equities drop

KUWAIT: Equities edged lower on Boursa Kuwait on Sunday with the General Market Index dropping 30.10 points to reach the level of 8237.10. About 8237 179.7 million shares were traded across 10,454 cash transactions worth KD 46.4 million (about \$162.4 million).

The first market index fell 24.7 points to 9,142.42 points, down 0.27 percent from 62.2 million shares in 468.42. The Main Index (Main 50) fell 56.3 points to 02.6660.02, down 0.84 percent from 108.2 million shares in 4,542 cash transactions.

Meanwhile, oil prices fell on demand fears arising from rising interest rates in the United States and COVID restrictions in China. “(Price) risks are certainly more tilted to the upside, given the war in Ukraine and a potential embargo on Russian exports, but lockdowns in China and the risk of a Fed-driven economic slowdown are also significant,” observed Craig Erlam, Senior Market Analyst.

Global stock markets had dropped sharply Friday as the latest hawkish commentary from the Federal Reserve sent investors fleeing equities on worries over higher interest rates.— Agencies

EU agrees deal to tame Internet ‘Wild West’

BRUSSELS: The European Union on Saturday finalized new legislation to require Big Tech to remove harmful content, the bloc’s latest move to rein in the world’s online giants. The Digital Services Act (DSA) — the second part of a massive project to regulate tech companies—aims to ensure tougher consequences for platforms and websites that host a long list of banned content, from hate speech to disinformation and child sexual abuse images.

EU officials and parliamentarians finally reached agreement at talks in Brussels early Saturday on the legislation, which has been in the works since 2020. “Today’s agreement on DSA is historic,” European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen tweeted. “Our new rules will protect users online, ensure freedom of expression and opportunities for businesses. What is illegal offline will effectively be illegal online in the EU.”

“Yes, we have a deal!” European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton tweeted. “With the DSA, the time of big online platforms behaving like they are ‘too big to care’ is coming to an end. A major mile-



stone for EU citizens,” said Breton, who has previously described the internet as the “Wild West”.

The EU’s provisional agreement reached Saturday remains subject to formal approval by the 27 member states and the European Parliament. The regulation is the companion to the Digital Markets Act (DMA), which targeted anti-competitive practices among tech behemoths such as Google and Facebook and was concluded in late March. The legislation had faced lobbying from the tech companies and intense debate over the extent of freedom of speech.

Obligations for large platforms

Tech giants have been repeatedly called out for failing to police their platforms—a 2019 New Zealand terror attack live-streamed on Facebook caused global outrage, and the chaotic insurrection in the US last year

27 member states, said in a statement. “The DSA follows the principle that what is illegal offline must also be illegal online. It aims to protect the digital space against the spread of illegal content, and to ensure the protection of users’ fundamental rights,” the statement continued. Hillary Clinton, the former US secretary of state and presidential candidate, has applauded the EU for taking action. “For too long, tech platforms have amplified disinformation and extremism with no accountability,” Clinton tweeted. “The EU is poised to do something about it.” The European Commission will oversee yearly audits and be able to impose fines of up to six percent of their annual sales for repeated infringements.

Among the practices expected to be outlawed is the use of data on religion or political views for targeted advertising. Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen caused a huge stir last year when she accused her former bosses of prioritizing profits over the welfare of users. Haugen posted Saturday’s decision. “Congratulations!!” she tweeted on Twitter.

Referring to Facebook’s new name, Meta, she added: “For the first time in history, the public is going to be able to ask independent questions about how @Meta and the other big platforms work and get the data to see the truth.” However, the European Consumer Organization (BEUC) feared the text does not go far enough. It wants a ban on all advertising based on the surveillance of internet users, and random checks on online vendors’ products.— AFP

Business

‘Bleed us dry’: Why technology platforms are facing rebellions

‘We’re entering a period of revolt and rebellion now’

PARIS: When Jak found online marketplace Etsy, it seemed like the perfect match: a tech platform for small traders to sell handmade items that promised to be a creative outlet and bring tidy profits.

Five years later, Jak is one of thousands in open rebellion against the place they once saw as a safe haven-part of a growing trend of users rising up against tech platforms. “We were lured in with the ‘shop small’ slogans and low fees and useful marketplace, and then once everyone had built their stores up, they started to tighten their grip and bleed us dry,” said the 30-year-old, who runs an online shop from Glasgow in Scotland and asked their surname not be used.

New York-based Etsy, which boasts sales of \$5 billion a year from around five million sellers and 90 million buyers, drew fury for hiking the fees it charges its small traders. More than 10,000 of its sellers closed their shops for a week from April 11, in effect going on strike.

It came weeks after users of video-sharing platform Vimeo expressed outrage at a similar price hike, and users of social media platform OnlyFans forced the owners to abandon a proposal to ban explicit content. Amazon has had countless battles with its sellers—a recent survey in Germany concluded almost 80 percent were unhappy with their relationship with the e-commerce giant.

And Uber faces frequent unrest-Indian drivers are currently refusing to turn on air-conditioning in protest at spiralling fuel prices and low fares. “We’re entering a period of revolt and rebellion now,” said Vili Lehdonvirta, a professor from Oxford University who tackles the power of tech platforms in a forthcoming book “Cloud Empires”. While he reckons many of these rebellions have a limited chance of short-term success, the long-term outlook is not a foregone conclusion.

The breaking point for Etsy sellers was a letter from the firm announcing the platform would take a 6.5 percent cut on each sale instead of five percent. The rationale, according to the firm, was to invest in marketing and entice more buyers. Kristi Cassidy, who sells gothic-style costumes and wedding dresses from Rhode Island in the United States, spearheaded the campaign to overhaul the new policy.

“Rather than rewarding the sellers whose hard work has enabled Etsy to become one of the most profitable tech companies in the world, Etsy gouges us, ignores us and patronizes us,” she wrote in an online petition now boasting more than 80,000 signatures. Sellers from around the world rallied to her call and complaints began to flood social media. “I live in constant fear of getting a reserve put on my account,” said Jak. Etsy can withhold or “reserve” a percentage of a seller’s income for up to 90 days if they suspect sales are not legitimate. —AFP

Aleid Foods AGM approves 8% cash distribution and 17% grant of shares

KUWAIT: The ordinary and extraordinary General Assembly of Aleid Foods approved the board of directors’ recommendation of cash distribution of 8 percent per share’s value (8 fils per share), and 17 percent grant of shares from the authorized capital for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2021, and that for shareholders registered in the company shareholder records.

In its meeting held on Sunday, Aleid Foods General Assembly approved all items on its agenda, most importantly the governance and audit committee’s reports for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2021. It also approved deducting 10 percent of the net profit for the voluntary reserve with a value of KD 230,280 to support the company’s financial position, and the election of the board of directors for three more years (2022-2023-2024). Furthermore, the general assembly approved to proceed with the listing of Aleid Foods Company in stock exchange markets outside Kuwait.

Moreover, Aleid Foods’ extraordinary general assembly discussed the topics on the agenda. It approved increasing the authorized and contributed capitals from KD 14,465,646 to KD 16,924,806. It also approved amending Article 5 of the Memorandum of Association and Article 5 of the Statute.

Aleid Foods Chairman of the Board Fahad Al-Mutairi said that the company started in 2021 to activate the restructuring plans, enabling the company to achieve operational sustainability and expand its circle of activities with the aim of improving its local and regional position.

Al-Mutairi added that for Aleid Foods, 2021 was a year of upgrading and creating balanced structure to achieve sustainability, and that by focusing on placing a clear and detailed work mechanism that lays the framework for restructuring its operations, reaching efficiency in standard operation procedures, and keeping up with business development. He pointed out that the company’s net profit increased by 39.8 percent, reaching KD 2,200,272 (two million, two hundred thousand and two hundred and seventy-two Kuwaiti dinars) for the fiscal year ending on

December 31, 2021, compared to a net profit of KD 1,573,324 for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020, in addition to making notable increase in shareholders’ equity by 8.2 percent.

Aleid Foods CEO Mohammad Al-Mutairi said that the company’s executive vision is based on measurable objectives and specific operational standards, which helped achieving its 2021 goals through three advanced operational lines, the first of which is adding regional and international trademarks to its list of owned and partner trademarks to diversify the food segments that the company serve. The second line is diversifying sources of income and basket of

ny’s restructuring program plans coincides with continued progress in Aleid Foods share’s growth and supporting its steady development to achieve sustainable profit for shareholders and partners. This led to increasing the company’s earnings per share by 39.8 percent for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2021 reaching 15.21 fils, compared to 10.88 fils for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020, while the company’s total operational revenue increased by 30.6 percent by the end of 2021 compared to the same period in 2020.

Al-Mutairi added that Aleid Foods General Assembly’s approval of listing the company in the stock exchange markets outside of Kuwait is a first step to achieve our regional expansion strategy known as Goals25 that includes taking Aleid Foods products and services model to the vital cities in the GCC markets and doubling the company’s profits by 2025. He further confirmed that Aleid Foods has an



KUWAIT: Aleid Foods Chairman of the Board Fahad Al-Mutairi addresses the General Assembly meeting on Sunday.

products to target all different consumer segments, which was translated by establishing centers, branches and subsidiaries such as Aleid Food Supply Center, Aleid Sweet & Deserts Center, and finally Legion Foods Company to enter the Horeca segment and serve hotels and restaurant catering services sector. The third line is attracting and cooperating with small and medium-sized local food projects to support the national product in the local market, especially scalable quality products.

Furthermore, he noted that activating the compa-

influential position in the local foods sector, noting that it retains a rich and diversified portfolio of products, services and trademarks aimed at the satisfaction of the gourmet consumers.

Al-Mutairi concluded by thanking the company’s board of directors and team for their trust in the ambitious strategy that the executive management placed four years ago, and which had a notable positive influence on the company’s performance, which happened to take place in the times of change that we are witnessing globally and regionally.

AL SAFAT

شركة الصفاة للاستثمار
AL SAFAT INVESTMENT COMPANY

KUWAIT BOURSA WEEKLY REPORT

WEEK ENDED ON 21 APRIL 2022

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Market	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
Premier Market	37,874	9,167.13	-0.1%	1.2%	20.0%	499,293,474	262,732,237	38,437	31.1	2.7	77.9%
Main Market	10,760	6,416.89	-2.2%	2.6%	9.0%	657,156,622	99,910,467	30,038	14.8	1.3	22.1%
All Share	48,634	8,267.20	-0.5%	1.5%	17.4%	1,156,450,096	362,642,704	68,475	27.3	2.4	100%

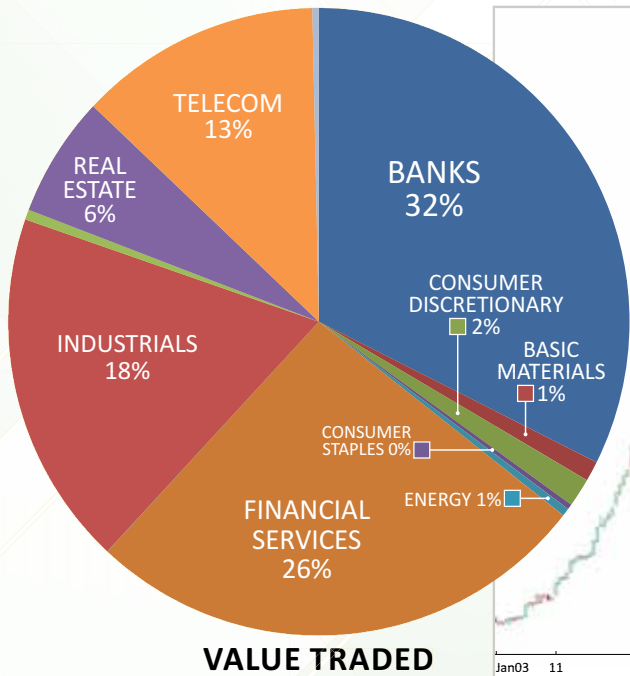
Sector	M. Cap (KD ml)	Last Close	WTD %	MTD %	YTD %	Quantity Traded	Value Traded	No. of Trades	P/E	P/B	% of Total M. Cap
BANKS	27,412	1,935.08	-0.8%	0.3%	19.2%	217,411,169	117,479,328	13,777	31.8	2.6	58.62%
BASIC MATERIALS	1,028	1,146.66	-1.0%	-1.3%	11.9%	5,090,362	3,746,900	680	27.0	1.6	2.20%
CONSUMER DISCRETIONARY	784	1,595.96	1.6%	3.4%	19.4%	18,031,876	5,369,924	1,946	31.6	6.6	1.68%
CONSUMER STAPLES	219	702.47	-0.1%	-1.3%	-3.9%	1,865,001	988,900	285	14.9	1.5	0.47%
ENERGY	286	1,250.24	-4.0%	-3.7%	-12.5%	15,677,730	1,471,806	893	13.5	1.4	0.61%
FINANCIAL SERVICES	4,589	1,639.89	1.0%	-1.3%	15.2%	547,829,889	95,458,961	20,342	11.8	2.2	9.81%
HEALTH CARE	246	481.41	-1.5%	-2.8%	-39.6%	103,101	53,102	12	14.8	2.6	0.53%
INDUSTRIALS	4,447	1,421.97	2.4%	9.8%	24.6%	101,117,262	66,589,597	12,932	39.2	1.4	9.51%
INSURANCE	687	1,549.87	0.5%	-4.4%	1.1%	12,424,249	1,877,673	622	8.1	1.2	1.47%
REAL ESTATE	2,970	1,378.34	-1.5%	-1.2%	3.9%	171,260,638	22,656,596	7,529	16.0	1.3	6.35%
TECHNOLOGY	9	694.04	1.4%	2.6%	1.5%	338,177	31,289	37	-	0.8	0.02%
TELECOMMUNICATIONS	3,838	1,371.91	-3.0%	8.7%	25.9%	59,827,826	45,700,629	9,026	16.2	2.2	8.21%
UTILITIES	249	578.95	-1.3%	-1.3%	-3.5%	5,472,816	1,217,999	394	19.2	4.0	0.53%

Top Gainers					
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
TIJARA	73.4	20.33	38,842,298	2,664,036	970
CABLE	1,781	19.05	4,965,787	8,445,167	1,698
MARAKEZ	62.9	18.68	2,397,572	138,250	243
NIND	322	18.38	103,542,038	32,361,798	3,988
SHIP	875	16.98	12,799,708	10,427,083	2,137

Top Volume					
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
NIND	322	18.38	103,542,038	32,361,798	3,988
ALOLA	91.4	5.30	89,354,612	7,936,589	1,819
GFH	100.4	-0.59	77,153,702	7,767,699	1,750
AUB	317	-0.63	69,567,059	22,007,972	1,359
ZAIN	651	3.33	50,502,583	33,528,934	5,705

Top Losers					
Stock	last Close	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
STC	850	-57.61	6,057,955	8,520,032	2,085
IPG	426	-16.31	140,187	60,901	38
FCEM	36.7	-12.62	687,424	25,657	35
PAPCO	71.3	-12.51	5,346	397	8
GFC	77	-12.00	29,590	2,397	11

Top Value					
Stock	Last	Change %	Volume	Value	Trades
KFH	980	-1.51	44,313,730	43,612,993	5,193
ZAIN	651	3.33	50,502,583	33,528,934	5,705
NIND	322	18.38	103,542,038	32,361,798	3,988
AGLT	1,234	0.57	24,847,080	30,660,370	3,936
NBK	1,043	-0.76	24,939,860	26,001,721	2,252



All Share Price Index YTD



Market Summary:

- Premier market volume and value increased 12% and 18%, respectively. Main market volume and value increased 21% and 4%, respectively.

- Premier and Main indices both closed below last week's closing which explains the increase in volume and value due to an increase in selling.

- Technically, the All-Share index closed at 8267, with support levels at 8261, 8216, 8177, and 8151, while resistance at 8314. Premier index closed at 9167, support levels at 9130, 9083, 9061, 9021, and 8990, while resistance at 9184. The Main index closed at 6416, support levels at 6411, 6383, 6357, and 6321 while resistance at 6463.

Business

Al-Sager: NBK continues to seize growth opportunities during post-COVID recovery

NBK Group Vice-Chairman and CEO on the sidelines of analyst conference for 1Q22

Isam Al-Sager

- Our profits in 1Q2022 increased substantially, and our business continued to maintain a leadership position
- We achieved remarkable progress in implementing our digital transformation strategy and successfully rolled out numerous technology initiatives
- Political tensions have a negative impact on reforms and economic diversification
- The government is faced with limited alternatives, and it is imperative to quickly pass key draft laws, most importantly, the mortgage law and public debt law
- We stepped up our efforts to integrate ESG practices into our long-term strategies and business plans

KUWAIT: Isam Al-Sager, the Vice-Chairman and CEO of National Bank of Kuwait (NBK) Group said: "We continued to capture the growth opportunities arising from the improved business sentiment; allowing us to generate healthy revenue trends, solid bottom-line growth and strengthening our market leadership position." On the sidelines of the analyst conference for the results of 1Q22, Al-Sager mentioned that NBK reported quarterly profits of KD 116.6 million, growing by 38.3 percent year on year. The solid bottom line growth stems from improving revenue trends as well as continued normalization in the cost of risk.

"We achieved good progress in advancing our strategic agenda towards digital transformation as well as in executing various technological initiatives. We are stepping into 2022 backed by our strong operational success during the pandemic. Our experience during the pandemic confirmed the soundness of the Group's diversification strategy, its flexible business model and ability to overcome crises," he noted.

Reducing emissions

Al-Sager pointed out: "During the quarter, we advanced our efforts to embed ESG practices into our long-term strategies and business plans. NBK also established its Sustainable Financing Framework with the aim of integrating environmental and social standards into our business practices to support the transitions to a more sustainable economy; in line with New Kuwait Vision 2035."

"In parallel, we also announced our target to reduce our operational GHG emissions by 25 percent by the year 2025, as a key environmental initiative under our sustainability commitment," he added.

Continued recovery

Al-Sager mentioned that the operating environment in Kuwait continued to witness some signs of improvement during the first quarter of 2022, despite the ongoing political friction. This was mainly driven by the improved pace of consumer spending and the steady increase in the production and price of oil, which reflected positively on business sentiment and activity.

We forecast GDP growth for 2022 at 8.5 percent on the back of that rebound in oil production and prices, while non-oil growth is expected to reach 4 percent for the year, he noted.

On the projects market, Al-Sager said that during the quarter KD 110 million of awards were recorded, noting that although the figure fell short of expectations due to the slow approval process as well as supply chain issues, project awards are expected to gradually recover through the remainder of the year, with estimated KD 2.5 to 3.0 billion worth of projects that are currently scheduled for awarding in the coming months, he elaborated.

Corporate credit

On a question about corporate credit, Al-Sager said: "Corporate credit is not slow and has been picking up and we are still in the beginning of the year. There is potential growth already in the pipeline. We hope that by the next quarter or by the one after to witness a robust recovery reflected in our numbers."

Important laws

Al-Sager said he is positive that both public debt

and mortgage laws will be passed soon, despite the tension between the government and the Parliament as well as other factors including the recent improvement in public financial position due to higher oil prices, as there are no choices for the government but to pass these two laws.

Generally speaking, the political tension has a negative effect on economic reform and diversification but the government is in a very challenging position and has very limited alternatives leaving no choice but to pass several important laws like mortgage and debt laws, he continued.

Al-Sager mentioned that there has been a slowdown in project awards in the past due to conflict between the government and parliament. But now, and despite the government resignation, the improved health situation and the easing of restrictions from the pandemic have lifted corporate activity in 2021, where project awards reached KD 1.5 billion.

We expect more projects to be awarded in various sectors including education, healthcare, communication, petrochemicals, as well as other sectors. We should see a pickup in tendering and awarding activity in 2022 with an estimate of around KD 2 to 3 billion of projects to be awarded for the rest of the year, he added.

On his part, Sujit Ronghe, Acting Group CFO of National Bank of Kuwait said: "Continued recovery and noticeable improvement in underlying operating drivers, strong loan growth, lower provisions and impairments, a healthy balance sheet, comfortable liquidity levels and a solid capital base were features of



NBK's 1Q22 results."

"The increase in net profit for 1Q22 reflects a robust performance by the Group, driven by continued growth in business volumes, increased operating income and lower net credit provisions and impairment losses. Group lending in particular, registered a strong growth of KD 330 million i.e. 1.7 percent during 1Q22," Ronghe mentioned.

"As regards loan growth, the Group reported a loan growth of 1.7 percent during 1Q22. Our expectation for loan growth for 2022 continues to be at a high single digit," he added. Ronghe expressed his optimism for continued improvement in the general operating environment, notwithstanding the recent surge in number of Covid-19 cases in some countries. Benchmark interest rates are set to increase in the current year. The bank's net interest income has generally benefitted in a rising interest rate scenario. However, he said, the timing and extent to which increases in local interest rates would follow international benchmarks remains to be seen.

The Acting Group CFO of National Bank of Kuwait noted: "With respect to the NIM, in a base case scenario, without considering any further increases in benchmark interest rates, we are expecting NIM to be broadly at similar levels with a slight declining trend, when compared to full year 2021, due to possible headwinds on funding costs. However NII and consequently NIM is poised to benefit from interest rate hikes."

As regards cost to income ratio, which stood at 38.9 percent for 1Q22, in the base case interest rate scenario and in continuation of our investment program in support of various Group initiatives, we expect the cost to income for 2022 to remain largely similar to 2021.



New Joyalukkas Exchange branch opened in Kuwait

KUWAIT: "Your favorite money exchange", Joyalukkas Exchange, opened a new branch in Mahboula Kuwait to expand its operations and serve more people in the country. The company aims to offer the best services and rates in money exchange to the people in and around the Mahboula area. The event was made even more special with the presence of the Joyalukkas Group's Chairman, Joy Alukkas, who inaugurated the branch.

"It was an honor to open the newest branch of Joyalukkas Exchange in Kuwait. Being "Your favorite money exchange", we always aim to offer the best services and rates. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our patrons for the love they have always shown us," said Joy Alukkas.

Also present were Ashraf, General Manager and Abdul Azeez, Assistant General Manager of Joyalukkas Exchange, Justin Sunny, General Manager - Operations - international operations, Sagar Sudheer - HR and admin international operations, Dileep P Nair - Marketing manager - international operations, and Vinod Regional Manager, Joyalukkas Jewellery Kuwait.

Hajer Abdulla takes home Gulf Bank's KD 100,000 prize

KUWAIT: In keeping with its commitment to providing its customers with exceptionally unique services and periodic draws, Gulf Bank has announced the lucky winner of its first quarterly Al-Danah draw prize of the year. The draw for the KD 100,000 prize took place under the supervision and in the presence of representatives from both the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

On this occasion, the General Manager of Consumer Banking at Gulf Bank, Mohammed Al-Qattan, said: "We would like to congratulate Hajer Faisal Baron Abdulla on winning the quarterly Al-Danah prize. We would like to wish the rest of our clients the best of luck in the upcoming Al-Danah draws, noting that there are still plenty more chances to win."

He pointed out that Gulf Bank is anticipating the announcement of the winner of its upcoming semi-annual Al-Danah account draw. The semi-annual draw winner is set to take home a prize of KD 1 million, noting that Gulf Bank is the only bank in Kuwait that proudly creates two millionaires a year. Al-Danah customers stand to win the semi-annual draw prize of KD 1 million on July 21, 2022 and the grand prize of KD 1.5 million on January 19, 2023.

The Al-Danah account is one of the most rewarding savings accounts in Kuwait, with its periodic draws that award valuable prizes and multiple benefits for account holders. Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account offers monthly opportunities to win KD 1,000 to ten lucky winners, in addition to two quarterly draws with KD 100,000 prizes each, a semi-annual draw prize of KD 1,000,000 and a grand draw prize of KD 1,500,000.

Al-Qattan continued, "We also pride ourselves on providing our customers with an exceptional and noteworthy banking experience that complements our societal role of encouraging a culture of savings; by rewarding savers with monthly, semi-annual and annual draws, we hope to motivate our customers and reinforce their saving habits, encouraging others to do the same. This is why the Bank recently decided to increase the number of Al-Danah Millionaires to two millionaires per year."

He added: "At Gulf Bank, we are keen to provide the best services and products to our esteemed customers, as we strive to continuously increase our customer satisfaction levels. Customer satisfaction was our main motivation for adjusting the new draw structure for the Al-Danah

account, and continues to be the main driving factor behind our periodic launches of various products and services that are characterized by growth, simplicity and innovation, as we continue to exceed the requirements and needs of our customers. Our team continues to pay close attention to the smallest of details in keeping with developments in the local and international banking market as we continue to consolidate Gulf Bank's leading position as the Kuwaiti Bank of the Future."

Exclusive loyalty program

As part of Gulf Bank's commitment to reward customers for their loyalty, the Al-Danah account provides account holders with loyalty chances. Loyalty chances are the total chances gained in the previous year, which are then transferred to the current year to reward customers for their loyalty to the Bank. Accordingly, all chances gained by existing Al-Danah customers in 2021 have been transferred and added to the 2022 chances, and this will be repeated in 2023 onwards. Terms and conditions apply.

Gulf Bank encourages Al-Danah account holders to increase their chances of winning by increasing the amounts deposited into their accounts. With Gulf Bank, depositing into an Al-Danah account is now easier than ever, as clients can deposit into their accounts using the ePay service, available through the Bank's Online/Mobile Banking services.

The Al-Danah account provides a multitude of valuable services to its customers, including access to an exclusive Al-Danah ATM card, ideal for depositing money into their accounts at any time. Account holders can now also calculate their chances of winning the monthly, quarterly and annual draws using the Al-Danah Calculator, available on Gulf Bank's Online and Mobile Banking App.

Opening an Al-Danah Account

Gulf Bank's Al-Danah account is open to both Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti residents of Kuwait. A minimum of KD 200 is required to open an account and the same amount must be maintained for customers to be eligible for the upcoming Al-Danah draws. If the customer's account balance falls below KD 200 at any given time, a KD 2 fee will be charged to the account monthly until the minimum balance is met. Customers who open an account and/or deposit more will enter the daily draw within two days. To participate in this year's upcoming quarterly and annual Al-Danah draws, customers must maintain the required balance.



Mohammed Al-Qattan

Huawei Consumer BG enters market with new office products

KUWAIT: Huawei Consumer BG will now enter the enterprise market officially, serving government and enterprise customers, as well as individual consumers. The announcement was made by Richard Yu, Huawei's Executive Director, Consumer BG CEO and Intelligent Automotive Solution BU CEO, at the Huawei Business Product Launch Event. Yu noted that Huawei would use its hardware and software ecosystems as dual pillars, to support a growing range of versatile office products that work seamlessly with a wide range of smart devices, including laptops, desktops, monitors, tablets, accessories, Visions, and wearables. These new office solutions will address the following key domains: government, education, health care, manufacturing, transportation, finance, and energy.

Rollout of comprehensive enterprise-centric products

With fast-changing business requirements, market conditions, the need for nimble office solutions has never been greater. Smart workplaces and equipment have begun to replace traditional office products, which tended to boast impressive specs and control costs at the expense of versatility and user experience. Huawei Consumer BG hopes to endow office and business prod-

ucts with newly smart and innovative capabilities, using its success in the consumer domain as a springboard for new-paradigm solutions. Huawei business products will meet customer requirements for performance and cost-effectiveness, while doubling down on a better and smarter user experience, based on next-level digital technology.

As Yu explained at the launch event: "Our consumer-oriented products have drawn widespread acclaim over the past decade, due largely to their groundbreaking user experience. Huawei will incorporate this premium consumer experience into its business products, following three key principles: quality, intelligence, and reliability."

As a new force in the enterprise equipment market, Huawei comes with a concept and vision that promise to revolutionize the industry. Huawei believes that the enterprise equipment is entering an era that will be dominated by Cloud and AI technologies, following 1.0 and 2.0 eras dominated by desktops and multi-device convergence respectively. Today's products emphasize performance, intelligence, full connectivity, and new paradigms centered around all-purpose convergence and intelligent interactions. At this crossroads in the enterprise market, characterized by widespread acceptance of versatile smart solutions, Huawei hopes to leverage its consumer electronics know-how to add new value and innovation, with the ultimate goal of building a high-quality, smart, and reliable platform to serve all government and enterprise customer needs.

Huawei has launched a full set of business products,



solutions, and service platforms, including MateBook B series for laptops, MateStation B series for desktops, Display B series for monitors, MatePad C series for tablets, B series for printers, B series for Visions, and B series for wearables, which make this vision access to a wide range of customers.

Huawei Consumer BG has unveiled a number of business solutions tailored to governments and small-, medium-, and large-sized enterprises, including paperless government office, smart classroom, computer classroom, health and safety management for miners, health management for drivers, and insurance interaction. The next phase will see Huawei Consumer BG invest more organizational resources in the business field, to help governments and large-scale enterprises fully digitalize their operations, and help small- and medium-sized enterprises to improve quality and efficiency across the board.

Huawei Consumer BG will always adhere to its three



key principles when developing business products, and building open, secure, and reliable software and hardware ecosystem capabilities to facilitate full digitalization for governments and large-scale enterprises. One-stop office solutions for small- and medium-sized enterprises, will be built on Consumer BG's accumulated smart office and cloud service prowess. Smart office features like Super Device and Mobile App Engine, allow for seamless multi-device and cross-ecosystem collaboration, while Huawei Mobile Cloud makes data transfers truly effortless, taking work efficiency to new heights.

Seven business product series

Huawei Consumer BG has launched seven major business product series for: laptops, desktops, monitors, tablets, printers, Visions, and wearables. These differentiated capabilities address diverse industry scenarios and customer needs.



Handout picture released by Rio de Janeiro's City Hall press office of Estacao Primeira de Manguera samba school parade during the first night of carnival at the Marques de Sapucaí Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. — AFP photos



Members of Vila Isabel samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade.



Members of Vila Isabel samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade at the Sambadrome Marques de Sapucaí in Rio de Janeiro.

'So much joy': Brazil holds first carnival since COVID

Rio de Janeiro's carnival, a glittering, sequin-studded festival of the flesh, exploded back to life Friday with the first famed samba school parades since COVID-19 hit Brazil. Shaking the ground in time to the beat, a sparkling sea of dancers, drummers and multi-story floats reclaimed the "Sambadrome," the iconic beach city's carnival parade venue, which had been turned into a drive-through vaccination center at the height of the health crisis. The all-night parades by the city's top samba schools Friday and Saturday are the first since February 2020, marking a turning point for Brazil, where COVID-19 has claimed more than 660,000 lives-second only to the United States.

"I'm just so happy. I think a lot of people are going to cry... including me," said geography teacher Ana Vieira, 48, who was wearing a giant, glistening white costume to parade for samba school Imperatriz. "You can see the happiness on people's faces after two long years." The festivities were hit by tragedy, however, when an 11-year-old girl died after being injured in a float accident during a lower-level samba school parade contest Wednesday.

'Couldn't sleep'

The pandemic had left Brazilians full of "saudades"-Portuguese for "longing"-for carnival, a free-for-all of dancing, singing and partying that is essentially the opposite of social distancing. "I couldn't sleep last night, I was so excited," said Rita



Members of Grande Rio samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade.

Marcelino, a 62-year-old domestic worker who was dancing frenetically as she waited to parade-a moment of catharsis after losing her job and "many" loved ones to the pandemic. There were concerns carnival would be axed again this year, after Rio authorities canceled it in 2021 and then postponed this edition by two months, wary of the Omicron variant. But with more than 75 percent of Brazil's 213 million people now fully vaccinated, the average weekly COVID-19 death toll has plunged from more than 3,000 a year ago to around 100 — allowing the show to go

on. All participants and the 75,000 attendees expected each night are required to present proof of vaccination.

'Two years of darkness'

Each group in the competition has 60 to 70 minutes to tell a story in music and dance, evaluated on nine criteria by the jury. The reigning champions, Viradouro, paid tribute to Rio's epic 1919 carnival-the first celebrated after the devastation of another pandemic, the Spanish flu. "No sadness can withstand so much joy," goes their samba theme song. "It's a love



Members of Grande Rio samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade.

letter to carnival... (about) coming back from a health crisis, taking off our masks and coming out stronger than we were before," said US expatriate Leslie Mercado, 48, at the parade finish line, after being extracted by crane from the top of a giant crystalline float that looked like a shimmering chandelier. Other schools picked themes charged with social messages, with Brazil facing divisive elections in October expected to pit far-right President Jair Bolsonaro against leftist ex-leader Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. Of the 12 schools, eight chose themes

dealing with racial injustice or Afro-Brazilian culture and history, loaded issues in a country where the current president has faced frequent accusations of racism.

"Brazil still suffers from racism. Nothing has changed. Slums, hunger, poverty... they have a color here: black," said Aristoteles Silva, 52, parading as a warrior for samba school Salgueiro, whose theme song was an anti-racist anthem entitled "Resistance." "I'm hoping the election will bring a total change." —AFP



Members of Vila Isabel samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade.



Members of Vila Isabel samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade at the Sambadrome Marques de Sapucaí in Rio de Janeiro.



Members of Grande Rio samba school perform during the second night of Rio's Carnival parade.

Gabon counts on visitors to help preserve great apes

Around a bend on a narrow trail that runs deep into the forest of Gabon's Loango national park, Kamaya comes into view. The huge silverback gorilla coolly watches visitors arrive, then goes back to his meal. Perched on a strong branch, the 150-kilo (330-pound) beast greedily pulls more leaves from the tree to his mouth with a slow but powerful movement before lumbering down the trunk. Soon he dozes off calmly. After two years of a total shut-down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the executive secretary of the National Parks Agency (ANPN) has decided to resume public observations of Gabon's gorillas, hoping the iconic species will serve as a "loss leader" to boost niche tourism.

That Kamaya and his family of about 10 individuals are so used to humans is the outcome of long labors by a team of trackers and scientists who also collect

data. They work to win funds to protect a species threatened with extinction and to attract foreign visitors. Spending one hour with Kamaya and his group costs 300,000 CFA francs, (450 euros, almost 500 dollars), on top of charges for access to the site and accommodation.

Loango Park, which covers more than 155,000 hectares (380,000 acres) of the densely forested country, offers ample reward for a 4-5 hour road journey from Port-Gentil, the second city, followed by the track and a final stage by boat. Though steep, the price is much lower than that paid to see the mountain gorillas in Uganda or Rwanda. It also generates income to manage protected areas that provide a safe place for the animals.

'Illegal activities'

"Tourism is a beneficial conservation strategy for gorillas," says Koro Vogt, manager of the Gorilla Loango project. The mountain gorillas of Rwanda and Uganda were almost extinct before funds from tourism helped to double their numbers in three decades, attaining a population of about 1,000 individuals today. The western gorillas are far more numerous. Their total population is estimated at 360,000 individuals across six central African countries, about a quarter of them in Gabon. The Loango park is home to nearly 1,500 gorillas, some 280 kilometers (175 miles) south of the capital Libreville. However, scientific studies by the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, which

specializes in great apes, indicate that the number of western gorillas is falling by three percent each year due to the destruction of habitat, poaching and disease. These threats are heightened by increased access to remote areas occupied by gorillas, the bush meat trade, corruption and lack of law enforcement.

Protected areas such as Loango, which are theoretically perfectly safe for animals, are home to only about 20 percent of the great apes in Gabon. "To safeguard the gorillas, our guards patrol the national parks to reduce illegal activi-

ties and catch poachers," says Christian Tchémambela, executive secretary of the ANPN. "This species emblematic of Gabon is also a strong draw for foreign visitors. The development of ecotourism is at the heart of our strategy," he adds. From June 2016 until the beginning of 2020, 845 tourists were able to observe the gorillas on site.

'Gain their trust'

A ray of sunlight pierces the treetops and shines on Mokebo, a 15-year-old female, and the little one she is carrying

on her back. Not yet a year old, Etchutchuku stirs, glances at the few people watching him, and hides shyly behind his mother. Close by, a nearly adult male, Waka, approaches the observers out of curiosity. He is unafraid, shows no signs of aggression and settles peacefully a few meters (feet) away. "This process is very long, it takes years to gain their trust and we are not sure of succeeding," says eco-guide Hermann Landry. "You have to follow them every day, all year round, relentlessly. Sometimes you lose track of them for several days and that's serious, because they can regain their natural fear of humans," adds Landry, a former poacher who declares that he "fell in love" with gorillas and conservation work.

During an initial habituation phase, gorillas are afraid of humans and run away when approached. In the next phase, they stop fleeing but may react with aggressive charges. In the final phase, they react calmly and continue their activities without concern about the human presence. Today, Gabon is counting on the gorillas to attract new visitors. There are two family groups in the country accustomed to humans, one in Loango, the other in the Moukalaba Doudou National Park 600 kilometers (370 miles) south of Libreville. However, tourist infrastructure is still almost nonexistent. —AFP



A silverback gorilla picks leaves to eat in Loango National Park. — AFP



Indian Ambassador Sibi George poses for a group photo with the dignitaries and members of the Kuwait Chamber Chorale.



Candle light vigil.



Indian Ambassador Sibi George inaugurates the 'Easter Concert' at the embassy auditorium. His spouse Joice Sibi looks on.



Kuwait Chamber Chorale performs.

Indian embassy's 'Easter Concert' celebrates India's 'unity in diversity'

By Sajeev K Peter

The Embassy of India in Kuwait hosted a musical evening titled 'Easter Concert', celebrating India's 'unity in diversity' at the embassy auditorium on April 21, 2022. The concert, presented by Kuwait Chamber Chorale, was attended by a large number of ambassadors resident in Kuwait and members of the Indian community. Dean of Diplomatic Corps and Ambassador of Tajikistan Dr Zabidullah

Zabidov and Apostolic Nuncio to Kuwait and Qatar Archbishop Eugene Nugent were among the dignitaries who were present at the concert.

The concert began with the National Anthem of India followed by many melodious numbers in multiple languages, marking the occasion of Easter. The concert also included patriotic songs like 'Vande Matharam' and 'Sare Jahan se Acha'. "Today, we are here joining our Christian brothers and sisters celebrating Easter,

observing the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In coming weeks and months, we will continue to celebrate in Kuwait, India's unity in diversity, as part of the 75th anniversary of India's independence and 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait," Indian Ambassador Sibi George said in his inaugural address.

Highlighting India's civilizational ethos, the ambassador said that Indians celebrate all festivals which symbolize India's

unity in diversity of which all Indians are proud of. Underlining the unique values of the constitution of India, the ambassador said every child in India is free to pursue his/her dream or follow his/her passion thanks to the constitution which guarantees justice - social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; and equality of status and of opportunity.

The ambassador pointed out that Indians in Kuwait are a cross-section of

India, representing its rich and varied culture, adding that the community members are contributing immensely to the economic development of Kuwait. "We have become an integral part of the sociocultural and economic fabric of Kuwait," he said. He thanked the Indian community for its contributions in promoting vibrant India-Kuwait bilateral relations, which have evolved into a long-standing dynamic partnership.

Tuft Love: Young Chinese weave away stress with crafts

Using a craft gun to shoot yarn through a fabric screen, Nora Peng puts the finishing touches on a rug in the shape of a corgi's bottom—the perfect stress-relieving hobby for her frantic days. She is one of a growing number taking up the handicraft "tufting" as the country's younger generations look for options away from the daily rat race. The handicraft creates versatile shapes and patterns by using a special gun to thread and cut yarn through fabric pinned to a wooden frame.

"I think tufting is very stress-relieving," college student Peng said, her voice almost drowned out by the noise of the tufting gun. "I have to read textbooks everyday for school and it's exhausting." Every weekend, Beijing's iHome tufting workshop attracts flocks of young handicraft lovers who spend the day carefully weaving yarn. On a recent Saturday around twenty young people, mostly women, packed out the brightly-lit studio, each holding a tufting gun in their hands. "It requires a lot of patience, but as



Participants using craft guns to make mats and rugs at a tufting workshop in Beijing.

long as you get the hang of it, tufting is not difficult," first-time tufter and state company employee Yan Xinyue told AFP. Chatter and laughter filled the room as they stopped to compare and admire each other's designs—mostly cartoon character carpets or colorful patched handbags and mirrors. Peng decided to have a go after seeing the craft trending on social media. "Everyone is making it, so I thought I'd come and try it as well."

Her cheeky corgi backside rug is a

place for her pet cat to sleep, she said. "I think it's cute and funny," she laughed. "(The design of) a corgi's little butt is very popular these days." Tufting's popularity has been hugely boosted by online influencers. "Making this gave me a sense of satisfaction," said Shi Ba, an influencer reviewing workshops for her online followers.

Stress relief

Weighed down by worries over the

high pressures of life, including growing inequality and the rising costs of living and property prices, China's young adults are looking for new ways to unwind. Stressed young people under thirty are typical tufting lovers according to Xu Shen, the founder of iHome tufting workshop. They want to "forget about their tedious work and just focus on making craftwork", he told AFP. Tufting has only become popular in China over the past three to five months, he added, but soaring demand for the craft has seen him already open nine stores across the capital. Each receives hundreds of customers per week—many drawn in through social media.

There are now more than 140 tufting workshops in Beijing alone, according to booking site Dianping. But the challenge is getting repeat customers, Mao Wei, the owner of Horus Club tufting workshop told AFP. Many are just one-time visitors who "come out of curiosity", he said. The hobby is riding a wave of popularity as it draws in young people hunting entertainment away from work, said Xu. "We know that (the development of) tufting will likely go through a bottleneck period, and the market will not grow anymore after it reaches a certain scale," he admitted. "But it's still on a rising trend." — AFP



Participants using craft guns to make mats and rugs at a tufting workshop in Beijing.

Belgian rock icon Arno dies aged 72

Veteran Belgian singer Arno, a rock icon known for his husky voice and unruly hair, died on Saturday from cancer at the age of 72, his agent announced. Arno, born Arnold Hintjens, was a national icon in Belgium, his gravelly voice compared to that of US singer-songwriter Tom Waits. Arno had announced in February 2020 that he was suffering from pancreatic cancer. "We'll all miss him, but he'll always be here thanks to the music that kept him going until the end," his Belgian agent Filip De Groote said in a statement.

Born in the Flemish coastal town of Ostend on 21 May 1949, Arno began with the group TC Matic in the 1980s. But it was as a solo artist that he reached a wider public, thanks to songs like "Les yeux de ma mere (My Mother's Eyes)". "He is an immense singer and poet, the Belgian national monument. And a monument of Europe," said Boris Vedel, director of the Printemps de Bourges music festival. In February, dressed in his usual black stage costume, Arno was received at the Royal Palace in Brussels by King Philippe, who called him an "icon of the Belgian scene". "Rest in peace, Arno. It was wonderful," tweeted Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo of the singer who once said he "had no borders in his head". — AFP



These photos show participants using craft guns to make mats and rugs at a tufting workshop in Beijing. — AFP photos



Lifestyle | Features



A general view of a wrecked Antonov military aircraft that is displayed.



An employee of Aziz Alibhai walks past wreckage of airplanes that are displayed on the edge of a landing strip in Songon Dagbe in the Jacqueville region. — AFP photos

WINGS OF A DREAM: I COAST TYCOON SEES NEW LIFE FOR WRECKED PLANES

“That one’s a DC-10, next to it you have a Fokker 28, over there are Boeing 737s...” Aziz Alibhai is showing the visitor his big love—an astonishing collection of plane wrecks that he wants to turn into an atypical tourist attraction. Airliners in various stages of genteel decline lie on his property in Songon, located between forest and lagoon about 30 kilometers (20 miles) from Ivory Coast’s economic capital, Abidjan. But Alibhai, an affable entrepreneur in his 70s, doesn’t like to hear the site described as a “graveyard.” For him, these former giants of the skies are worthy of respect, and they are a potential dollar-earner too.

In the wake of the post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011 that killed some 3,000 people in Ivory Coast, the businessman set out to buy planes that had been left abandoned at Abidjan airport. “It cost me an arm and a leg but I was so excited,” he says, preferring to “not even remember” the price.

Eleven disused planes were hauled to the vast site of his construction machinery rental company—it also houses the facilities of Ivoire Academie, a third division football club of which Alibhai is the president. Eight of the aircraft are lined up on an 800-metre (-yard) airstrip that leads to the placid lagoon. “Some planes had to be cut into two or three sections to be able to transport them without blocking the whole road,” he recalled.



An employee of Aziz Alibhai climbs into the wreckage of an airplane that is displayed on the edge of a landing strip.

‘Recyclers’

Born in Dar es Salaam on Tanzania’s Indian Ocean seaboard in the early 1950s, Aziz Alibhai came to Ivory Coast, on the other side of the continent, in 1968. He never left. Today, he wants to give the discarded aircraft a second lease on life—a passion that he shares with curious visitors. “I would like to turn them into conference rooms, a restaurant and why not? — luxury bedrooms,” he told AFP.

“We can modify them easily—the cabins have insulation and with a little air condi-

tioning it could work very well,” he argued. Rain, dust and sunshine have worn away much of the planes’ original paintwork, and in the DC-10’s luggage racks a few birds have made their nest. Inscriptions in the Greek alphabet state that the plane once belonged to a company called Electra Airlines. Inside this American-built workhorse, the cockpit seems frozen in the early 2000s, with a thick layer of dust covering the arrays of buttons and switches.

Further on, an Antonov An-12, main-



An employee of Aziz Alibhai is seen in the wreckage of a cockpit in a DC-10 aircraft that is displayed on the edge of a landing strip.

stay of the former Soviet Union as a military transport and cargo hauler for almost three decades, remains sliced in two parts, which border a football field. Alibhai envisages a terrace connecting the two giant sections, where visitors can have a drink. Seats have been stripped out of most of the planes and today accommodate spectators on the stands of the Ivoire Academie grounds. Some first-class seats are being used on Alibhai’s terrace, where he invites visitors to have a cocktail.

“We are very much recyclers,” Alibhai laughed, listing things made with salvaged objects in the buildings of his estate, such as sheds constructed with truck chassis and stairs made from bulldozer parts. He has further ambitions for his aircraft. “Displaying the aircraft components in a kind of museum, showing the planes’ most sophisticated parts—that is also something I’d like to do,” he dreams.—AFP

Johnny Depp in starring role at defamation trial

Testy at times, rambling and poetic at others, Johnny Depp has embraced a familiar role at his defamation trial against his former wife Amber Heard—the leading man. During three days on the witness stand, the three-time Oscar nominee has sought to convince a jury that the allegations of domestic abuse made against him by Heard are untrue and have destroyed his career.

Lawyers for the 36-year-old Heard have hammered away at the 58-year-old Depp’s history of drug and alcohol use in a bid to undermine his credibility. The “Pirates of the Caribbean” star has mostly kept his cool under cross-examination by Heard’s lawyers but has shown the occasional flash of anger.

Asked by her attorney Ben Rottenborn to answer a “simple yes or no question,” Depp snapped back: “Nothing is simple in this case.” Depp has also gotten the hang of the back-and-forth of the Virginia courtroom where high-powered lawyers for both sides are constantly interrupting each other to complain about hearsay. “That’s hearsay I guess,” Depp said of one of his own comments, drawing laughter from a gallery that includes some of the actor’s fans. “I’m learning.”

At other times, the actor has waxed lyrical during his frequently long-winded answers. Asked about the domestic abuse allegations against him, Depp compared it to “running between drops of lava.” “You’re trying to run between raindrops that kill you and destroy you.”

‘Monster’

Depp has turned up for the trial in Fairfax County Circuit Court with his hair tied back in a ponytail, earrings and chunky rings. He has favored three-piece suits in court and wore an all-black ensemble on Thursday—black suit, black vest, black shirt and black tie. The Texas-



US actor Johnny Depp testifies during the 50 million US dollar Depp vs Heard defamation trial at the Fairfax County Circuit Court in Fairfax, Virginia. — AFP photos

born Heard, who had a starring role in the movie “Aquaman,” has gone mainly for black pant suits and a change of hairstyle each day.

She has remained mostly stoic during Depp’s testimony, listening attentively, whispering with her lawyers and taking notes on a yellow legal pad. She did noticeably flinch when a video was shown on Thursday of an angry Depp slamming cabinet doors in their kitchen. The actress was also clearly distressed when an audiotape was played for the jury during which she pleaded with Depp not to cut himself with a knife.

Heard’s attorneys have alleged that Depp would become a physically and sexually abusive “monster” when he was drunk or on illegal drugs and have questioned him extensively about his substance use. Asked about partying with the shock rocker Marilyn Manson, Depp said: “We drank together. We’ve had cocaine together maybe a couple of times.” In a text message to another friend, the actor Paul Bettany, Depp talked about taking a plane flight having had “no food for days, powders, half a bottle of whiskey, 1,000 Red Bull and drinks, pills and two bottles of champers.”

Text messages

There have been enough references to celebrities during the trial’s first week to fill a tabloid. Depp said he suspected the actor James Franco was having an affair with Heard. Heard, for her part, was jealous about a tattoo Depp had that read “Winona Forever”—a reference to former girlfriend Winona Ryder.



US actress Amber Heard reacts as she listens to an audio recording of she and US actor Johnny Depp.

Depp said he had the last two letters removed so the tattoo now reads “Wino Forever.” Depp was asked about text messages seeking advice on sobriety from Elton John and others to singer Patti Smith in which he acknowledged drinking too much. Domestic abuse is at the core of the trial and both Depp and Heard have accused each other of being violent during their 2015 to 2017 marriage.

Depp said he told several people about being struck by Heard, including director Tim Burton, one of his “dearest friends,” and Alice Cooper, a member of Depp’s band, “The Hollywood Vampires.” Obscenity-laced text messages from Depp to various people have been read out in court in which he calls Heard a “slippery whore” and other epithets.

In one message, Depp refers to his ex-partner, singer Vanessa Paradis, the mother of their two children, as a “French extortionist.” Asked about the messages, Depp acknowledged he could be over the top but said “when I write a text... it’s a canvas, it’s a painting.” Depp is suing Heard over a column she wrote for The Washington Post in 2018 in which she described herself as a “public figure representing domestic abuse.” Heard did not name Depp but he sued her for implying he was an abuser and is seeking \$50 million in damages. Heard countersued, asking for \$100 million and claiming she suffered “rampant physical violence and abuse” at his hands. The trial resumes on Monday. — AFP

Leopard shot dead after attacking policeman in Iranian city

A leopard was shot dead in the northern Iranian city of Ghaemshahr on Sunday after attacking and injuring a policeman, state media reported. The endangered big cat “was killed by two bullets to save the life of the police officer,” said Moslem Ahangari, head of the Mazandaran province Environmental Protection Unit, according to the IRNA news agency. The health of the police officer was reported to be “stable,” it added.

Earlier, the province’s environment protection spokesman, Kamyar Valipur, had reported that the leopard had “attacked and injured a policeman before fleeing towards a garden”, IRNA reported. The leopard was then taken to a wildlife centre but died of the gunshot wounds. A video posted on social media shows the leopard crouched on the city street outside a bank. Panicked, the animal jumps a few seconds later, and flees.

The inhabitants are seen terrified, screaming and running in all directions,

according to the images. According to the IRNA agency, the province’s environment department is investigating whether the animal entered the city from forested areas or was being illegally kept in a local household.

Persian leopards are listed as an endangered species on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. They are a panther sub-species native to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Caucasus. Fewer than 1,000 are believed to exist in the wild, with another 200 in captivity. Many wild animals, including wolves and foxes, have been seen in urban areas in Iran in recent weeks, according to Hamshahri, the daily newspaper of Tehran’s municipality. The newspaper notably reported the sighting of a bear in the southern town of Marvdasht and a wolf attack on two elderly women in Khalkhal, northwest Iran. —AFP



Sports

Afghan women players make football debut in Australia

MELBOURNE: Players from Afghanistan's national women's football team competed in a local league match in Australia on Sunday for the first time since fleeing the hardline Islamist Taliban. The result was a scoreless draw after an Afghan goal was disallowed for being offside in a lower league amateur match in the eastern state of Victoria.

But for the Afghan women it was a powerful, symbolic victory as they returned to the pitch together after leaving their homeland to rebuild their lives in Australia. The game showed that the Taliban could not stop the players, said team captain Nilab, who like her teammates did not give a family name so as to protect relatives living in Afghanistan. "We still continue our fight and our combat just to play for the Afghanistan people," she told AFP. "We fled the country but we are still thinking of our country and we are still working for our victory for our country."

Australia helped dozens of Afghan national women's team players and their relatives to escape when the Taliban swept back to power eight months ago. The Taliban have since severely curtailed the freedoms of women, banning girls' education and preventing women from even boarding planes without a male relative. As players fled to different countries, the women's national team was fragmented.

'Together and powerful'

But many settled in and around Melbourne, capital of the eastern state of Victoria, where professional A-League Women's side Melbourne Victory helped them to return to the field. Goalkeeper Fatima said people who had seen social media images of Afghanistan after the Taliban's return could understand something of the courage required by players to leave their homes. "They can understand how hard and how challenging that was for all of us to be in that situation," she told AFP. "Today, we are playing as a team and together and powerful. It's incredible."

Team coach Jeff Hopkins praised their performance against amateur Melbourne side ETA Buffalo SC - a club established in 1982 by friends who had migrated from East Timor - in the Football Victoria State League 4 West competition. "These young women, all they want to do is to be given the chance to just be treated equally, to be able to play the game they love," Hopkins told AFP. "That obviously wasn't happening for them in Afghanistan - they were being persecuted for it," he said.

A few days ahead of Sunday's match, Melbourne Victory presented the Afghan Women's Team with their new predominantly red kit, complete with shirts showing off the Afghan national flag. The shirts are marked with numbers but no names for the safety of players' families in Afghanistan. —AFP



MELBOURNE: Members of the Melbourne Victory Afghan women's team pose for a team photo before their first match in a local league against ETA Buffalo SC on April 24, 2022. —AFP

Romantic Warrior adds imperious QEII Cup win to HK glory

HONG KONG: Hong Kong Derby winner Romantic Warrior became the fifth horse to take out the QEII Cup in the same season with a commanding victory in the Group One showpiece at Sha Tin on Sunday. The Danny Shum-trained four-year-old stamped himself as a genuine star of Hong Kong racing by cruising home in the 2,000m (10 furlong) HK\$25 million (US\$3.2 million) contest - the city's third richest.

Backed into odds-on favoritism at \$1.8, Romantic Warrior simply outclassed his more senior rivals to win by more than two lengths under Karis Teetan and join Vengeance Of Rain, Ambitious Dragon, Designs On Rome and Werther in completing the prestigious double. "The Derby was very special for all of us. This race we thought was a good plan with no international horses coming," jockey Teetan said. "We had in mind that he's a bit younger than the other horses but he's better than all of them - he proved what kind of horse he is today."

While Champions Day was devoid of international raiders because of Hong Kong's Covid-19 situation, horse owners were able to return to the course after more than three months of closed-door meetings. They were treated to a show of brilliance by reigning Horse of the Year Golden Sixty, who defeated rising star California Spangle by two lengths to win the Champions Mile and claim his sixth Group One victory. "He's once in a lifetime," jockey Vincent Ho said of the Francis Lui-trained Golden Sixty. "He still wanted to slow down a bit the last couple of strides but he did amazing." —AFP

Kohli flops again as Bangalore dismissed for 68 in 9-wicket loss

MUMBAI: Virat Kohli's second successive golden duck in the IPL saw Royal Challengers Bangalore crash to 68 all out and lose to Sunrisers Hyderabad by nine wickets on Saturday but the team insisted their star batter will bounce back. Kohli, who also fell to a first-ball duck against Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday, came to the crease in the second over after South African pace bowler Marco Jansen bowled Bangalore captain Faf du Plessis for five.

Kohli pushed hard at a ball angled across him by the left-arm quick, and edged to Aiden Markram at second slip, who pounced a comfortable catch. Kohli, the standard bearer for Indian cricket who has been replaced by Rohit Sharma as India's captain across formats, has now scored just 119 runs from eight matches.

"He is somebody who has performed consistently for a number of years at this franchise. I think he is going through a rough patch in the sense things are not going his way at the moment," said Bangalore head coach Sanjay Bangar. "It's a tough phase for him certainly but we are very confident that he will come back strong."

Former India coach Ravi Shastri had suggested that an "overcooked" Kohli should take a break from the sport, but Bangar said he is taking enough breaks (in international cricket) and needs "a bit of luck to get going". Former England batter Kevin Pietersen said Kohli, who has failed to score a century in over 100 matches across formats, has come to a point where the ex-India captain is questioning his own form.

"It's very a lonely, lonely place, especially when you have got all eyes," said Pietersen on Saturday. "That camera not only right here but every single thing is Kohli, Kohli, Kohli and so he is in that dark place. I just hope it ends quickly because the game needs him to score runs." Three balls after Kohli's dismissal, the same Jansen-Markram combination accounted for opener Anuj Rawat to leave Bangalore reeling at 8-3. Jansen finished with 3-25 from his four overs. —AFP

Celtics push Nets to brink, Mavs and T-Wolves pull level

NEW YORK: The Toronto Raptors stayed alive, the Utah Jazz and Minnesota Timberwolves pulled level, and the Boston Celtics pushed the Brooklyn Nets to the brink of elimination in the NBA playoffs on Saturday. Jayson Tatum scored 39 points to lead the Celtics in a 109-103 victory over the Nets in Brooklyn that pushed their lead in the NBA Eastern Conference first-round series to 3-0.

No NBA team has come back from a 3-0 deficit to win a best-of-seven series, and the Celtics will try to wrap this one up on the Nets' home floor on Monday. "It's about our character now," Nets coach Steve Nash said. "It's about digging deep and having pride and finding a way over the next 48 hours to come back ready to win on Monday night."

Once again the Celtics' suffocating defense neutralized Brooklyn's scoring star Kevin Durant, who finished with 16 points and attempted just 11 shots. Brooklyn's other big star, Kyrie Irving, also finished with just 16 points. The Celtics led most of the game before the Nets cut the deficit to three points late in the third quarter. Boston responded with two baskets from Marcus Smart and a steal and dunk from Jaylen Brown to take an 81-72 lead into the fourth.

Brown finished with 23 points for the Celtics, who pushed the lead to 15 in the fourth quarter before the Nets closed in again, pulling within five points with 22 seconds remaining. Tatum made two free throws and came up with a steal and a final dunk to end it. "I think it just shows the growth of our team," Tatum said. "Early in the season, we gave up big leads all the time. And we figured it out. You're never going to be perfect, it's all about how you respond. We kept responding."

Raptors stay alive

In Toronto, forward Pascal Siakam scored a playoff career-high 34 points and Gary Trent Jr. added 24 in the Raptors' 110-102 triumph over the Philadelphia 76ers to cut the deficit in their series to 3-1. The Sixers can still advance in the best-of-



NEW YORK: Blake Griffin #2 of the Brooklyn Nets is fouled by Grant Williams #12 of the Boston Celtics during Game Three of the Eastern Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Barclays Center on April 23, 2022. —AFP

seven set with a game-five victory at home on Monday, but there are injury concerns for 76ers center Joel Embiid, who played through a painful right thumb injury in producing 21 points and eight rebounds.

"I'm not really worried about what can happen, I'm worried about what I can do," Embiid said, making it clear that even if doctors suggest surgery that won't happen until after the post-season. "It's the playoffs," he said. "Nothing is going to stop me." In Salt Lake City, Rudy Gobert's slam dunk with 11 seconds remaining gave the Utah Jazz a 100-99 victory over the Dallas Mavericks that knotted their Western Conference series at two games apiece.

The Jazz spoiled the return from injury of Mavericks guard Luka Doncic. The Slovenian star, who hadn't played since April 10 due to a left calf strain, scored 30 points on 11-of-21 shooting while pulling down 10 rebounds. "I was really excited," Doncic said of getting back on court. "I missed basketball." Doncic sank a jumper to put Dallas

ahead and added a 3-pointer with 39 seconds remaining to give the Mavericks a 99-95 lead.

But Utah's Donovan Mitchell answered with a 3-point play and Gobert's dunk proved decisive. The Timberwolves rebounded from an embarrassing defeat to hold off the visiting Memphis Grizzlies 119-118 and knot their series at two games apiece. Karl-Anthony Towns scored 33 points and pulled down 14 rebounds and Anthony Edwards added 24 points for the Timberwolves, who had let slip a 25-point third-quarter lead in losing the previous game.

They led by as many as 13 in the third quarter, but there were some more nervous moments as the Grizzlies, fueled by 34 points from Desmond Bane, cut the deficit to two with six seconds left. Towns made a pair of free throws to push the lead to 119-115, and Bane's eighth three-pointer of the night wasn't enough. "I'm just happy we got the win," Towns said. "You can tell I'm not that excited because we've got more to do. We've got to fight, fight fight." —AFP

ABK congratulates Amiri Hospital on success of its Health Awareness Run

KUWAIT: Al Ahli Bank of Kuwait (ABK) announced its inaugural sponsorship of the first annual Health Awareness Run organised by Al Amiri Hospital held at Shaheed Park in Kuwait, this sponsorship marks the latest step in ABK's increasing focus towards encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle. Focusing on the overall health and wellbeing of the public, the Health Awareness Run was attended by families, medical staff and avid runners, both male and female from different age groups. ABK's participation in the Health Awareness Run underpins its commitment to redefine Kuwait's health and fitness paradigm.

Commenting on the sponsorship, Fawzy Al-Thunayan, General Manager of Board Affairs at ABK said: "As a true community bank, ABK is invested in supporting the needs of the community. By participating in the Health Awareness Run, our goal is to raise awareness about the importance of a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. This partnership grows out of ABK's steadfast commitment to promoting health and wellbeing as embodied by its corporate citizenship platform. We endeavour to build vibrant and connected communities across our footprint. We believe that this is increasingly



Fawzy Al-Thunayan



important and directly contributes to the betterment of public health."

The Health Awareness Run was born out of a desire to equip the community with the necessary information to make informed decisions. At the heart of the initiative is the goal of creating a happier and healthier Kuwait. The Health Awareness Run addresses various health concerns that a healthy diet and exercise can mitigate. For instance, appropriate food coupled with an active lifestyle boosts the body's ability to fight heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, depression,

arthritis and several types of cancer.

The Philips 2021 global sleep survey highlights that 45 percent of global consumers reported that their time spent fully asleep has decreased since the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies have shown that proper exercise can lessen sleep-related problems, and getting an adequate amount of sleep may promote healthier physical activity levels during the day. In addition to the health run, the attendees could interact and engage with various medical departments, pharmaceuticals and nutrition companies who had set up booths at the event.

Sports

PSG wrap up record-equaling 10th Ligue 1 title despite Lens draw

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain secured a record-equaling 10th Ligue 1 title on Saturday, moving level with Saint-Etienne, despite being held to a 1-1 home draw by 10-man Lens. Lionel Messi looked to have curled in a fine winner in the 68th minute, but Lens dampened the already muted title party at the Parc des Princes through Corentin Jean with two minutes left.

PSG have an unassailable 16-point lead over second-placed Marseille with four matches remaining. "The atmosphere is a shame," captain Marquinhos told Canal+. "Football is our passion, we started very young. We'll try to have as much fun as possible. It's a shame that won't be with the supporters but we have to deal with it."

Mauricio Pochettino's men reclaim the crown from Lille, who were shock champions last season. It is the capital giants' eighth Ligue 1 triumph in the last 10 seasons, powered by the investment of their Qatari owners. This season will still be seen as a failure for PSG, though, after collapsing to a dramatic loss to Real Madrid in the Champions League last 16, after also suffering a surprise French Cup loss to Nice.

On Saturday, an inevitable league title was confirmed in a strangely non-celebratory atmosphere in Paris, with some 'ultras' leaving early in protest after the Champions League exit. "That's something I don't understand," said midfielder Marco Verratti. "I know that they were disappointed about Madrid, but at some point you have to move on." Attention in the French capital will now turn to the future of Kylian Mbappe, with the star forward still to decide whether to stay at PSG or leave for Real Madrid before next season.

Lens started brightly, with Seko Fofana firing an

early strike just over the crossbar. PSG grew into the game, though, with visiting goalkeeper Jean-Louis Leca forced into smart saves from Achraf Hakimi and Messi. The first big chance fell to Mbappe just after the half-hour mark, but the striker blazed wildly over after being played in on goal by Neymar's clever flick. Lens continued to threaten on the break, though, and a well-worked move ended with Jonathan Clauss shooting too close to Keylor Navas.

Mbappe almost broke the deadlock early in the second half after a quick free-kick by Verratti, but his first effort was saved by Leca and his follow-up attempt was blocked on the line. PSG's hopes of wrapping up the title with a win were given a boost in the 57th minute, as Danso was shown a second yellow card for a tackle on Neymar. Messi almost found the corner of the net with the resulting free-kick, but Leca plunged to his right to make another good save. Sergio Ramos should have scored midway through the second half, but the veteran center-back scooped over from eight yards out.

Messi strikes

It was Messi who finally gave the match a moment to remember, bending a trademark finish over Leca from the edge of the box. The Argentinian has now scored four Ligue 1 goals in a disappointing first season for PSG since leaving Barcelona. But, perhaps fittingly, the hosts conceded a late equaliser as Jean slid in at the back post to divert home Deiver Machado's low cross.

European hopefuls Lens pushed for a winner which would have kept PSG waiting for at least another 24 hours, but the home side held on and



PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi celebrates after opening the scoring with Brazilian forward Neymar and Brazilian defender Marquinhos during the French L1 match between against Lens at The Parc des Princes Stadium on April 23, 2022. —AFP

almost won it themselves when Mbappe dragged horribly wide. The final whistle brought bizarre scenes, with the Lens players celebrating and PSG's newly-crowned champions looking sheepish.

Elsewhere on Saturday, Monaco moved into third place above Rennes with a 4-1 victory at relegation-threatened Saint-Etienne. The game was suspended

for more than half an hour due to smoke from flares in the crowd. Wissam Ben Yedder scored his 20th league goal of the season as Monaco's sixth straight league win lifted them above Rennes, who host Lorient on Sunday, on goal difference. The third-placed side secures a place in Champions League qualifying. —AFP

Bayern down Dortmund to win 10th straight title

BERLIN: Bayern Munich were crowned Bundesliga champions for the 10th consecutive season on Saturday after a 3-1 home win over second-placed Borussia Dortmund. First-half goals by Serge Gnabry and Robert Lewandowski put Bayern in control at a sold-out Allianz Arena before Emre Can converted a penalty after the break for Dortmund. But teenager Jamal Musiala fired in a late goal to spark early celebrations in the home crowd.

This is the first time a club has won 10 straight titles in one of Europe's top five leagues. "The year wasn't that easy. That's why I'm happy that we crowned it with the championship title," said Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann, who was drenched in beer by his players. The Bavarian giants' eighth successive win over Dortmund leaves Bayern an unassailable 12 points clear with three games left.

The title capped an up-and-down season for Bayern, who were dumped out of the Champions League in the quarterfinals by Villarreal earlier this month. "It was important that we finished things off after being knocked

out by Villarreal," said Bayern captain Manuel Neuer. "Everyone wanted it, that's what's special in our team."

Thomas Mueller, who claimed a record-breaking 11th Bundesliga winner's medal, said: "We were able to get a few things off our chest. Now it's wonderful." Bayern dominated the opening half and Gnabry fired a magnificent volley into the top corner from the edge of the box to give them a 15th-minute lead. Gnabry had a second effort disallowed before Lewandowski doubled the advantage 11 minutes before half-time.

It was the Poland striker's 27th goal in 26 matches against Dortmund, who he left for Bayern in 2014. But his future is in doubt, with Lewandowski's contract up next year and Barcelona reportedly interested in taking him to the Camp Nou. "Something will happen soon. The only thing I know is that there will be a meeting (with Bayern)", he told Sky.

Dortmund responded early in the second half as Can converted a penalty after Marco Reus was brought down in the area. The visitors had their appeals for another spot-kick waved



MUNICH: Bayern Munich's Polish forward Robert Lewandowski celebrates scoring a goal with his teammates, German midfielder Joshua Kimmich, French forward Kingsley Coman and German midfielder Leon Goretzka during the German first division Bundesliga match against Borussia Dortmund on April 23, 2022. —AFP

away with 30 minutes left when Lucas Hernandez brought Jude Bellingham down in the area. Lewandowski won the battle of the Bundesliga's star strikers as Erling Haaland, who has been linked with big-money move to Manchester City, failed to score despite forcing Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer into two late saves. Musiala put the result beyond doubt when he slotted home seconds after his initial shot was saved by Dortmund keeper Marwin Hitz.

Earlier, Union Berlin scored two late goals to poach a 2-1 win at RB Leipzig, which kept alive their Champions League qualification hopes. Bayer Leverkusen thumped bottom club Greuther Fuerth 4-1 to take third place from Leipzig and move three points clear of fifth-placed Freiburg in the race for the top four. Freiburg missed the chance to draw level on points with Leipzig, conceding a late equalizer in a 3-3 draw with Borussia Moenchengladbach. —AFP

On Friday, Ahly forced a 1-1 draw away to Raja Casablanca for a 3-2 overall victory while Setif upset Esperance of Tunisia 1-0 in Rades to win by the same score on aggregate. Wydad are hot favorites to complete the semi-finals line-up having beaten Belouizdad 1-0 in Algiers last weekend. Peter Shalulile wasted a great early chance to score for Sundowns by blazing over and Zwane watched in horror on the stroke of half-time as his penalty struck the outside of the post.

The territorial supremacy of the South African side finally paid off on 49 minutes when Brazilian goalkeeper Wellington Lima spilled a free-kick and Onyango fired into the net. Joaquim 'Kinika' Balanga thought he had equalized soon after, but the goal was disallowed for a foul on goalkeeper Denis Onyango by defender Pedro Pinto. —AFP

another spot-kick. It was a shock outcome as Sundowns, after winning home and away against title-holders Al Ahly of Egypt during the group stage, were favored to win the southern African showdown. Apart from the group achievements of Sundowns, doubts had been raised about the defensive strength of Petro after a 5-1 hammering by Wydad Casablanca of Morocco in their last away outing.

Petro qualified 3-2 on aggregate after a 2-1 home win last weekend and now face Wydad or Chabab Belouizdad of Algeria, who play later on Saturday. Title-holders Al Ahly of Egypt meet Entente Setif of Algiers in the other semi-final, with the first legs scheduled for May 6-7 and the return matches for May 13-14. The single-match final of the premier African club competition, which carries a \$2.5 million first prize, is set for May 29 at a venue yet to be announced.

Four-goal Jesus stretches Man City lead

MANCHESTER: Gabriel Jesus scored four goals as Manchester City thrashed Watford 5-1 to open up a four-point lead in the Premier League title race, while Arsenal beat Manchester United 3-1 to take control of the race for fourth. City are five games away from defending their title, but manager Pep Guardiola has warned they will need to win every one to hold off Liverpool's storming end to the season.

Guardiola could afford the luxury of making six changes for the visit of the Hornets, who are headed back to the Championship. Jesus, who was strongly linked with a summer move to Arsenal this week, was one of those recalled to the starting line-up and gave Guardiola a tough call to make in his selection for Real Madrid's visit to the Etihad on Tuesday in the first leg of the Champions League semi-finals.

The Brazilian took just four minutes to open the scoring with a tap-in from Oleksandr Zinchenko's cross and doubled City's lead by heading home Kevin De Bruyne's wicked ball into the box. Hassane Kamara's fine strike briefly gave Watford hope, but Rodri's stunning volley quickly restored City's two-goal cushion. Jesus completed his first Premier League hat-trick from the penalty spot and had De Bruyne to thank for another inch-perfect pass as he blasted in his fourth.

"I'm happy it was my day," said Jesus. "Now is the best moment of the season. When you decide the games and win the trophies. That's what football is for us." Liverpool have the chance to cut the gap at the top back to one point when they host struggling Everton in the Merseyside derby on Sunday.

Arsenal are in pole position for a place in next season's Champions League after rounding off a miserable week for United at the Emirates. Mikel Arteta's men made the most of a fast start as Nuno Tavares opened the scoring after just two minutes before Bukayo Saka's penalty made it 2-0. Cristiano Ronaldo returned to the United side after missing Tuesday's 4-0 humiliation at the hands of Liverpool due to the death of his newborn baby son. —AFP

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LONDON: Britain's Tyson Fury lands a punch to knock out Britain's Dillian Whyte in the sixth round and win their WBC heavyweight title fight at Wembley Stadium on April 23, 2022. —AFP

Fury beats Whyte to retain world title

LONDON: Tyson Fury retained his WBC heavy-weight crown on Saturday, stopping Dillian Whyte in round six of an all-British bout at a delirious Wembley Stadium before repeating his suggestion that he would now retire. The win for the self-styled 'Gypsy King', fighting on UK soil for the first time in four years, was witnessed by 94,000 fans in London - a post-war British record crowd.

Unbeaten Fury, 33, had said this would be his last fight and announced immediately afterwards: "This might be the final curtain for the Gypsy King. And what a way to go out." After a cagey opening the defending champion took the initiative, controlling the fight and landing some telling blows to the head and body of his opponent.

Whyte could have few complaints at a halt being called with just one second remaining before the fight reached the midway point as he was clearly on unsteady legs after the first significant strike of the bout, a brutal right uppercut from Fury. The 6 feet 9 inch (206-cm tall) Fury was able to use his considerable height and reach advantage to keep Whyte at

bay while the challenger was made to look clumsy and cumbersome.

Whyte, cut over his right eye after an accidental clash of heads, was first installed as the WBC's number one contender nearly four years ago but he was unable to impose himself. "I'm overwhelmed with the support," said Fury. "I can't believe that my 94,000 countrymen and women have come here tonight to see me perform. "I just want to say from the bottom of my heart, 'Thank you so much to every single person who bought a ticket here tonight or stayed up late to watch it on TV'."

Unification bout

If Fury does follow through with his plan to quit, he would spurn the chance to face either Oleksandr Usyk - the current WBA, IBF and WBO champion - or fellow British fighter Anthony Joshua for the undisputed crown. No boxer has held all the major world heavyweight belts since Britain's Lennox Lewis, who became the undisputed champion in 1999.

But Fury, now unbeaten in 33 fights, appears to be sticking to his guns. "I promised my lovely wife Paris

of 14 years that after the Wilder three fight, that would be it," he said. "And I meant it. We had a war. It was a great trilogy. And I meant that. But I got offered to fight at Wembley at home, and I believe that I deserved - that I owed it to the fans."

Jamaica-born Whyte, 34, was greeted with boos as he emerged into the cavernous stadium, dressed in black. Excitement levels hit fever pitch as Fury entered to the strains of Don McLean's "American Pie", which accompanied a video montage of his career. Fury, wearing a white and red robe and gloves featuring the Cross of St George - the flag of England - sat on a gold throne as fireworks shot into the air before jogging to the ring.

After delighting the crowd with his victory, he led them in another rendition of "American Pie". Fury hailed Whyte as a "warrior", predicting he would be a world champion one day but said his opponent had met a "great" in the sport. "I'm one of the greatest heavyweights of all time," he said. "And unfortunately for Dillian Whyte, he had to face me here tonight. There's no disgrace." — AFP

Tigers' Cabrera bags 3,000th MLB hit

DETROIT: Detroit Tigers slugger Miguel Cabrera joined Major League Baseball's elite 3,000-hit club on Saturday, becoming just the 33rd player to reach the milestone. The 39-year-old became just the seventh player to achieve 3,000 career hits and 500 home runs, joining Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, Pujols, Eddie Murray, Alex Rodriguez and Rafael Palmeiro.

"Special numbers," Cabrera said after the Tigers completed a 13-0 victory over the Colorado Rockies in the first game of a double-header. Cabrera, the first Venezuelan to record 3,000 hits in an MLB career, singled to right field off compatriot Antonio Senzatela in his first at bat in the contest at Detroit's Comerica Park, punching a 1-1 fastball and holding one arm into the air as he headed to first base.

The crowd of 37,566 chanted "Miggy! Miggy!" as his Tigers teammates poured onto the field to congratulate him. Colorado shortstop and former Tiger Jose Iglesias was there for a hug, too. Cabrera then celebrated behind home plate with his wife Rosangel, mother Gregoria Torres, Daughter Brisel and son Christopher.

When an emotional Cabrera returned to first base, former Tiger C J Cron pretended to check his pulse. "To be able to look over there and see 3,000, it was really special," Cabrera said. The two-time American League Most Valuable Player, and winner of the 2012 American League batting triple-crown, joined St. Louis Cardinals designated hitter Albert Pujols as the only active players with 3,000 hits.

Only three other active players - Robinson Cano, Yadier Molina and Joey Votto - have as many as 2,000. Cabrera had put himself on the brink of 3,000 with singles in his first three at-bats on Wednesday in the Tigers' 5-3 loss to the New York Yankees. He was 0-for-3 at the plate with an intentional walk in Thursday's 3-0 victory over New York. Cabrera entered MLB in 2003, joining the then-Florida Marlins and winning a World Series title with them before signing for the Tigers in 2008. As the 3,000-hit milestone approached he has shied away from talking about it, preferring to focus on the team's goals. But Tigers manager A J Hinch said this week he has urged Cabrera's younger teammates to take notice of what they are seeing. — AFP



DETROIT: Miguel Cabrera #24 of the Detroit Tigers singles against the Colorado Rockies during the first inning of Game Two of a doubleheader at Comerica Park on April 23, 2022. — AFP

Betis beat Valencia on penalties to win Copa del Rey

SEVILLE: Real Betis won the Spanish Copa del Rey on Saturday, beating Valencia 5-4 on penalties in Seville after a thrilling final finished 1-1 after extra time. Valencia's Yunus Musah blazed over in the shoot-out, allowing Juan Miranda the chance to score the winning penalty at La Cartuja as Betis claimed the fourth major trophy in the club's 115-year history.

Borja Iglesias had headed Betis in front but Hugo Duro equalized for Valencia before half-time and neither side could find a winner, either in the second period or extra time. But Musah's error and Miranda's cool head gave Betis the cup for a third time, in their home city, following the club's two previous triumphs in 1977 and 2005.

Betis captain Joaquin hoisted the trophy after it was presented to him by the king of Spain, Felipe VI. "I have tears of emotion, tears of joy," said Joaquin. "It's what we all wanted, to win a cup again, the Copa del Rey, as beautiful as we know it is." Joaquin, the 40-year-old winger, who made his debut for Betis aged 19 in 2000 and played in the final 17 years ago, came on in the 86th minute and scored a penalty. It remains to be seen whether he decides this is a fitting end now to what has been a remarkable career.

"I am going to enjoy the moment," said Joaquin. "We are Copa del Rey champions and we dedicate this to all the people who have been with us - the coaching staff, masseurs, cooks, waiters - all those people whose work is not seen but deserve as much credit as us." Many had billed this as a clash of styles, with the swashbuckling approach of Betis tasked with breaking down the grit and resilience of Valencia, but in reality both teams contributed equally to an open and enthralling final. "Football can be beautiful and it can also be cruel. It hurts," said Valencia's Jose Gaya.

It was only the second final in 14 years not to include any of Real Madrid, Barcelona or Atletico Madrid and while Betis and Valencia are hardly minnows in Spain, there was no doubting the weight of the occasion for both clubs. Valencia won the Copa del Rey in 2019, beating Barca in the final, but a fire-sale of key players under the controversial ownership of Peter Lim means the team have been



SEVILLE: Real Betis players celebrate their victory after winning the Spanish Copa del Rey final against Valencia at La Cartuja Stadium on April 23, 2022. — AFP

more concerned about relegation in recent seasons than winning trophies.

Betis, meanwhile, have spent three seasons in the second tier since they last won it in 2005, the same year they finished fourth in La Liga, which they still hope to replicate this season but have never managed to repeat since.

Betis make fast start

Betis flew out of the blocks and took the lead in the 11th minute, a slick move down the right seeing Nabil Fekir slide through Hector Bellerin, who floated a superb cross into the area. Borja jumped high and headed straight, the power of the connection enough to beat Giorgi Mamardashvili. Valencia were shaking and Betis kept coming. Borja headed just wide and then almost latched onto an underhit backpass by Mouctar Diakhaby, which needed Mamardashvili to scramble clear.

But the Betis assault subsided in the 30th minute Valencia struck, a brilliant counter-attack giving them a foothold in the final. Carlos Soler steered a superb first-time pass from the right wing into central midfield, where Ilaix Moriba had

space to advance. Duro was racing away but the gap was tight, Moriba feathering the ball through for his teammate, who scooped a delightful finish into the net.

The second period grew increasingly frantic, an end-to-end contest bringing Betis back into the ascendancy. Borja's effort was well blocked by Valencia's Gabriel Paulista before Juanmi hit the post, his drive beating Mamardashvili but not the frame. Fekir almost won it in the last 10 minutes but was denied by Mamardashvili's legs while Soler had a chance in injury time after a misplaced pass by Bellerin but Claudio Bravo made the stop.

Joaquin had come on, a fairy tale in his sights, but nobody could find a winner and the quality dropped in extra time as fatigue and cramp set in. Soler and Uros Racic scored confident penalties for Valencia, matched by those of Willian Jose and Joaquin for Betis, even if Mamardashvili got a hand to Joaquin's shot. Goncalo Guedes and Andres Guardado made no mistake but Musah erred, firing over to let Betis in. Cristian Tello and Gaya both scored, leaving Miranda with the chance to win it. Mamardashvili jumped right, the ball went left. — AFP